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THE BEST MAN

BY

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CHAPTER I.

CYRIL GORDON had been seated at his desk but ten minutes and was deep in the morning's mail when there came an urgent message from his chief, summoning him to an immediate audience in the inner office.

The chief had keen blue eyes and shaggy eyebrows. He never wasted words; yet those words when spoken had more weight than those of most other men in Washington.

There was the briefest of good-morning gleams in his nod and glance, but he only said:

"Gordon, can you take the Pennsylvania train for New York that leaves the station in thirty-two minutes?"

The young man was used to abrupt questions from his chief, but he caught his breath, mentally surveying his day as it had been planned.

"Why, sir, I suppose I could—if it is necessary——" He hesitated.

"It is necessary," said the chief curtly, as if that settled the matter.

"But—half an hour!" ejaculated Gordon in dismay. "I could hardly get to my rooms and back to the station. I don't see how—Is n't there a train a little later?"

"Later train won't do. Call up your man on the 'phone. Tell him to pack your bag and meet you at the station in twenty minutes. You'll need evening clothes. Can you depend on your man to get your things quickly, without fail?"

There was that in the tone of the chief that caused Gordon to make no further demur.

"Sure!" he responded with his usual business-like tone, as he strode to the 'phone. His daze was passing off. "Evening clothes?" he questioned curiously, as if he might not have heard aright.

"Yes, evening clothes," was the curt answer, "and everything you'll need for daytime for a respectable gentleman of leisure—a tourist, you understand."

Gordon perceived that he was being given a mission of trust and importance, not unmixed with mystery, perhaps. He was new in the secret service, and it had been his ambition to rise in his chief's good graces. He rang the telephone bell furiously and called up the number of his own apartments, giving his man orders in a breezy, decisive tone that caused a look of satisfaction to settle about the fine wrinkles of the chief's eyes.

"Now, sir," said Gordon, as he hung up the receiver, "I'm ready for orders."

"Well, sir, you are to go to New York, and take a cab for the Cosmopolis Hotel—your room there is already secured by wire. Your name is John Burnham. The name of the hotel and the number of your room are on this memorandum. You will find awaiting you an invitation to dine this evening with a Mr. Holman, who knows of you as an expert in code-reading. Our men met him on the train an hour ago and arranged that he should invite you. He did n't know who they represented, of course. He has already tried to 'phone you at the hotel about coming to dinner to-night. He knows you are expected there before evening. Here is a letter of introduction to him from a man he knows. Our men got that also. It is genuine, of course.

"Last night a message of national importance, written in cipher, was stolen from one of our men before it had been read. This is now in the hands of Holman, who is hoping to have you decipher it for him and a few guests who will also be present at dinner. They wish to use it for their own purposes. Your commission is to get hold of the message and bring it to us as soon as possible. Another message of very different import, written upon the same kind of paper, is in this envelope, with a translation for you to use in case you have to substitute a message. You will have to use your own wits and judgment. The main thing is, *get the paper, and get back with it*, with as little delay as possible. Undoubtedly your life will be in danger should it be discovered that you have made off with it. Spare no care to protect yourself *and the message*, at all hazards. Remember, I said, *and the message*, young man! It means much to the country.

"In this envelope is money—all you will probably need. Telegraph or 'phone to this address if you are in trouble. Draw on us for more,

if necessary, also through this same address. Here is the code you can use in case you find it necessary to telegraph. Your ticket is already bought. I have sent Clarkson to the station for it, and he will meet you at the train. You can give him instructions in case you find you have forgotten anything. Take your mail with you, and telegraph back orders to your stenographer. I think that is all. Oh, yes, to-night, while you are at dinner, you will be called to the 'phone by one of our men. If you are in trouble, this may give you opportunity to get away, and put us wise. You will find a motor at the door now, waiting to take you to the station. If your man does n't get there with your things, take the train, any way, and buy some more when you get to New York. Don't turn aside from your commission for anything. Don't let *anything* hinder you. Make it a matter of life and death. Good-morning, and good luck!"

The chief held out a big, hairy hand that was surprisingly warm and soft considering the hardness of his face and voice, and the young man grasped it, feeling as if he were suddenly being plunged into waves of an unknown depth and he would fain hold on to this strong hand.

He went out of the office quietly enough, and the keen old eyes watched him knowingly, understanding the beating of the heart under Gordon's well-fitting business coat, the mingled elation and dread over the commission. But there had been no hesitancy, no question of acceptance, when the nature of the commission was made known. The young man was "game." He would do. Not even an eyelash had flickered at the hint of danger. The chief felt he would be faithful even in the face of possible death.

Gordon's man came rushing into the station just after the young secret service man reached there himself. Clarkson was already there with the ticket. Gordon had time to scribble a message to Julia Bentley, whose perfumed scrawl he had read on the way down. Julia had bidden him to her presence that evening. He could not tell whether he was relieved or sorry to tell her he could not come. It began to look to him a good deal as if he would ask Julia Bentley to marry him some day, when she got tired of playing all the others off against him, and he could make up his mind to surrender his freedom to any woman.

He bought a paper and settled himself comfortably in the parlor car, but his interest was not in the paper. His strange commission engaged all his thoughts. He took out the envelope containing instructions and went over the matter, looking curiously at the cipher message and its translation, which, however, told him nothing. It was the old chief's way to keep the business to himself until such time as he chose to explain.

Gordon carefully noted down everything that his chief had told him, comparing it with the written instructions in the envelope; arranged in

his mind just how he would proceed when he reached New York; tried to think out a good plan for recovering the stolen message, but could not; and so decided to trust to the inspiration of the moment. Then it occurred to him to clear his overcoat pockets of any letters or other tell-tale articles and stow them in his suit-case. He might have to leave his overcoat behind him. It would be well to leave no clues for them to follow.

Having arranged these matters, and prepared a few letters with notes for his stenographer, to be mailed back to her from Philadelphia, he reread Julia Bentley's note. When every angular line of her tall script was imprinted on his memory, he tore the perfumed note into tiny pieces and dropped them from the car window.

The question was, did he or did he not want to ask Julia Bentley to become his wife? He had no doubt as to what her answer would be. Julia had made it pretty plain to him that she would rather have him than any of her other admirers; though she did like to keep them all attendant upon her. Well, that was her right so long as she was unmarried. He had no fault to find with her. She was a fine girl, and everybody liked her. Also, she was of a good family, and with a modest fortune in her own right. Everybody was taking it for granted that they liked each other. It was time he was married and had a real home, he supposed, whatever that was—that seemed to have so great a charm for all his friends. To his eyes, it had taken on no alluring mirage effect. He had never known a real home, more than his quiet bachelor apartments were to him now, where his man ordered everything as he was told, and the meals were sent up when wanted. Gordon had money enough from his inheritance to make things more than comfortable, and he was deeply interested in the profession he had chosen.

If he was ever going to marry, it was high time, of course. But did he want Julia? He could not quite make it seem pleasant to think of her always in his rooms when he came home at night. She would always be wanting to go to her endless theatre parties and receptions and dances; always be demanding his attention. She was bright and handsome and well dressed, but he had never made love to her. He could not quite imagine himself doing so. How did men make love, any way? Could one call it love when it was "made" love? These questions followed one another idly through his brain as the landscape whirled past him. If he had stayed at home, he would have spent the evening with Julia, as she requested in her note, and there would probably have been a quiet half-hour after other callers had gone.

Suppose, for instance, they were married, and she sat beside him now. Would any glad thrill fill his heart as he looked at her beautiful face and realized that she was his? He tried to look over toward the next chair and imagine that the tired, fat old lady with the double chin

and the youthful purple hat was Julia, but that would not work. He whirled his chair about and tried it on an empty chair. That went better; but still no thrill of joy lifted him out of his sordid self. He could not help thinking about little trying details. The way Julia looked when she was vexed. Did one mind that in the woman one loved? The way she ordered her coachman about. Would she ever speak so to her husband? She had a charming smile, but her frown was—well—unbecoming, to say the least.

He tried to keep up the fallacy of her presence. He bought a magazine that he knew she liked, and read a story to her (in imagination). He could easily tell how her black eyes would snap at certain phrases she disliked. He knew just what her comment would be upon the heroine's conduct. It was an old disputed point between them. He knew how she would criticise the hero, and somehow he felt himself in the hero's place every time she did it. The story had not been a success, and he felt a weariness as he laid the magazine aside at the call for dinner from the dining-car.

Before he had finished his luncheon he had begun to feel that though Julia might think now that she would like to marry him, the truth about it was that she would not enjoy their actual life together any better than he would. Were all marriages like that? Did people lose the glamour and just settle down to endure each other's faults and make the most of each other's pleasant side, and not have anything more? Or was he getting cynical? Had he lived alone too long, as his friends sometimes told him, and so was losing the ability really to love anybody but himself? He knit his brows, and got up whistling to go out and see why the train had stopped so long in this little country settlement.

It was just beyond Princeton, and they were not far now from New York. It would be most annoying to be delayed so near to his destination.

It appeared that there was a wrecked freight ahead of them, and there would be delay. No one knew just how long. It would depend on how soon the wrecking train arrived to help.

Gordon walked nervously up and down the grass at the side of the track, looking anxiously each way for sign of the wrecking train. The thought of Julia did occur to him, but he put it impatiently away, for he knew just how poorly Julia would bear a delay on a journey even in his company. He had been with her once when the engine got off the track on a short trip down to a Virginia house-party, and she was the most impatient creature alive, although it mattered not one whit to any of the rest of the party whether they made merry on the train or at their friend's house. And yet, if Julia were anything at all to him, would not he like the thought of her companionship now?

A great white dog hobbled up to him and fawned upon him as he

turned to go back to the train, and he laid his hand kindly upon the animal's head, and noted the wistful eyes upon his face. He was a noble dog, and Gordon stood for a moment fondling him. Then he turned impatiently and tramped back to his car, but the dog persisted in following him.

An hour later, when the train started on its way again, though Gordon had paid a man for holding the dog until he was on his way, the animal managed to board the train too late to be thrown off, bringing with him a most annoying and amusing train of experiences which hindered the man not a little before he managed to get rid of him.

Having disposed of the dog, he took a taxicab for his hotel, giving the chauffeur directions to use all possible speed. The distance was but half covered when the cab came to an abrupt standstill, and Gordon found that a little newsboy had been knocked down and injured by their haste. This necessitated a still further delay in getting the child to the hospital. It seemed imperative that he should do so, both to satisfy his own conscience at having been even the innocent cause of injury to the child, and to satisfy the officers of the law, who might have made serious trouble for him.

All this took much longer than he had expected; and all the time the words of his old chief, "Don't let anything hinder! Don't let anything hinder!" rang changes in his frantic ears.

CHAPTER II.

He arrived at the hotel at last, and was in the act of signing the unaccustomed "John Burnham" in the hotel registry, when there came a call to the telephone.

With a hand that trembled from excitement, he took the receiver. His breath went from him as though he had just run up five flights of stairs. "Yes? Hello! Oh, Mrs. Holman. Yes—Burnham. I've but just arrived. I was delayed. A wreck ahead of the train. Very kind of you to invite me, I'm sure. Yes, I'll be there in a few moments, as soon as I can get rid of the dust of travel. Thank you. Good-by."

It all sounded very commonplace to the clerk, but it seemed to Gordon that he was shouting his commission through the streets of New York.

The young man made short work of his toilet. Just as he was leaving the hotel a telegram was handed him. It was from his chief, and so worded that to the operator who had copied it down it read like a hasty call to Boston; but to Gordon's code-enlightened eyes it was a blind to cover his exit from the hotel and from New York, and set any possible hunters on a wrong scent.

Gordon had a nervous feeling as he again stepped into a taxicab and gave the order, "To the Union Station." He wondered how many

stray dogs, and newsboys with broken legs, would attach themselves to him on the way to dinner; but he arrived safely at the station, checked his suit-case, and took another cab to the residence of Mr. Holman, without further incident.

The company were waiting for him, and after the introductions they went immediately to the dining-room. Gordon took his seat with the feeling that he had bungled everything hopelessly, and had arrived so late that there was no possible hope of his doing what he had been sent to do. For the first few minutes his thoughts were a jumble, and his eyes dazed with the brilliant lights of the room. He could not single out the faces of the people present and differentiate them one from another. His heart beat painfully against the stiff expanse of evening linen. It almost seemed as if those near him could hear it. He found himself starting and stammering when he was addressed as "Mr. Burnham." His thoughts were mingled with white dogs, and ladies with scornful smiles.

He was seated on the right of his hostess, and gradually her gentle manners gave him quietness. He began to gain control of himself, and now he seemed to see afar the keen eye of his chief watching the testing of his new commissioner. His heart swelled to meet the demand made upon him. A strong purpose came to him to rise above all obstacles and conquer in spite of circumstances.

From that moment the dancing lights that multiplied themselves in the glittering silver and cut glass of the table began to settle into order; and slowly, one by one, the conglomeration of faces around the board resolved itself into individuals.

There was the pretty, pale, eager hostess, whose gentle ways seemed hardly to fit with her large, boisterous, though polished husband. Unscrupulousness was written all over his ruddy, polite features; also a certain unhidden craftiness which passed for geniality among his kind.

There were two others with faces full of cunning, both men of wealth and culture. One did not think of the word "refinement" in connection with them; still, that might be conceded also; but it was all dominated by the cunning that on this occasion, at least, was allowed to sit unmasked upon their faces. They had outwitted an enemy, and they were openly exultant.

Of the other guests, one was very young and sleek, with eyes that had early learned to evade; one was old and weary-looking, with a hunted expression; one was middle-aged, with little eyes set close in a fat, selfish face. Gordon began to understand that these three but did the bidding of the others. They were there because they were needed, and not because they were desired.

There was one bond which they seemed to hold in common: an alert readiness to combine for their mutual safety. This did not manifest

itself in anything tangible, but the guest felt that it was there and ready to spring upon him at any instant.

All this came gradually to the young man as the meal with its pleasant formalities began. As yet nothing had been said about the reason for his being there.

"Did you tell me you were in a wreck?" suddenly asked the hostess sweetly, turning to him, and the table talk hushed instantly while the host asked, "A wreck! Was it serious?"

Gordon perceived his mistake at once. With instant caution, he replied smilingly, "Oh, nothing serious—a little breakdown on a freight ahead, which required time to patch up. It reminded me——" and then he launched boldly into one of the bright dinner stories for which he was noted among his companions at home. His heart was beating wildly, but he succeeded in turning the attention of the table to his joke, instead of to asking where he had come from and on what road. Questions about himself were dangerous. He succeeded in making every man at the table feel that he was delightful, a man to be thoroughly trusted and enjoyed; who would never suspect them of having any ulterior motives in anything they were doing.

The conversation for a little time rippled with bright stories and repartee, and Gordon began almost to feel as if he were merely enjoying a social dinner at home. Then suddenly the crisis arrived.

The soup and fish courses had been disposed of, and the table was being prepared for the entrée. The host leaned back genially in his chair and said, "By the way, Mr. Burnham, did you know I had an axe to grind in asking you here this evening? That sounds inhospitable, doesn't it? But I'm sure we're all grateful to the axe that has given us the opportunity of meeting you. We are delighted at having discovered you."

Gordon bowed, smiling at the compliment, and the murmurs of hearty assent around the table showed him that he had begun well. If only he could keep it up! But how, *how*, was he to get possession of that magic bit of paper and take it away with him?

"Mr. Burnham, I was delighted to learn through a friend that you are an expert in code-reading. I wonder, did the message that my friend Mr. Burns sent you this morning give you any intimation that I wanted you to do me a favor?"

Gordon bowed again. "Yes; it was intimated to me that you had some message you would like deciphered, and I have also a letter of introduction from Mr. Burns."

Here Gordon took the letter of introduction from his pocket and handed it across the table to his host, who opened it genially, as if it were hardly necessary to read it. The duplicate cipher writing in Gordon's pocket crackled knowingly when he settled his coat about him

again, as if it would say, "My time is coming! It is almost here now."

The young man wondered how he was to get it out without being seen, in case he should want to use it, but he smiled pleasantly at his host, with no sign of the perturbation he was feeling.

"You see," went on Mr. Holman, "we have an important message which we cannot read, and our expert, who understands all these matters, is out of town and cannot return for some time. It is necessary that we know as soon as possible the import of this writing."

While he was speaking Mr. Holman drew from his pocket a long, soft leather wallet and took therefrom a folded paper which Gordon at once recognized as the duplicate of the one he carried in his pocket. His head seemed to reel and all the lights go dark before him as he reached a cold hand out for the paper. Something of the coolness of a man facing a terrible danger came to him now. By sheer force of will, he held his trembling fingers steady as he took the bit of paper and opened it, carelessly, saying as he did so:

"I will do my best."

There was a sudden silence, and every eye was fixed upon him as he unfolded the paper. He gave one swift glance about the table before he dropped his eyes to the task. Every face held the intensity of almost terrible eagerness, and on every one but that of the gentle hostess sat cunning—craft that would stop at nothing to serve its own ends. It was a moment of almost awful import.

The next instant Gordon's glance went down to the paper in his hand, and his brain and heart were seized in the grip of fright. There was no other word to describe his feeling. The message before him was clearly written in the code of the home office, and the words stared at him plainly, without the necessity of study. The import of them was the revelation of one of the most momentous questions that had to do with the secret service work, a question the answer to which had puzzled the entire department for weeks. That answer he now held in his hand, and he knew that if it should come to the knowledge of those outside before it had done its work through the department it would result in dire calamity to the cause of righteousness in the country, and incidentally crush the inefficient messenger who allowed it to become known. For the instant Gordon felt unequal to the task before him. How could he keep these bloodhounds at bay?—for such they were, he perceived from the import of the message; bloodhounds who were getting ill-gotten gains from innocent and unsuspecting victims—some of them little children.

But the old chief had picked his man well. Only for an instant the glittering lights darkened before his eyes and the cold perspiration started. Then he rallied his forces and looked up. The welfare of a

nation's honor was in his hands, and he would be true. It was a matter of life and death, and he would save it or lose his own life if need be.

He summoned his ready smile.

"I shall be glad to serve you if I can," he said. "Of course, I'd like to look this over a few minutes before attempting to read it. Codes are different, you know, from one another, but there is a key to them all if one can just find it out. This looks as if it might be very simple."

The spell of breathlessness was broken. The guests relaxed and went on with their dinner.

Gordon, meanwhile, tried coolly to go on with a pretense at eating, the paper held in one hand while he seemed to be studying it. Once he turned it over and looked on the back. There was a large cross mark in red ink at the upper end. He looked at it curiously and then instinctively at his host.

"That is my own mark," said Mr. Holman. "I put it there to distinguish it from other papers." He was smiling politely, but he might as well have said, "I put it there to identify it in case of theft;" for every one at the table, unless it might be his wife, understood that that was what he meant. Gordon felt it and was conscious of the other paper in his vest-pocket. The way was going to be most difficult.

Among the articles in the envelope which the chief had given him before his departure from Washington were a pair of black rubber-rimmed eye-glasses, a false mustache, a goatee, and a pair of eyebrows. He had laughed at the suggestion of high-tragedy contained in the disguise, but had brought them with him for a possible emergency. The eye-glasses were tucked into the vest-pocket beside the duplicate paper. He bethought himself of them now. Could he, under cover of taking them out, manage to exchange the papers? And if he should, how about the red-ink mark across the back? Would any one notice its absence? It was well to exchange the papers as soon as possible, before the writing had been studied by those at the table, for he knew that the other message, though resembling this one in general words, differed enough to attract the attention of a close observer. Dared he risk their noticing the absence of the red cross on the back?

Slowly, cautiously, under cover of the conversation, he managed to get that duplicate paper out of his pocket and under the napkin in his lap. This he did with one hand, all the time ostentatiously holding the code message in the other hand, with its back to the people at the table. This hand meanwhile also held his coat lapel out that he might the more easily search his vest-pockets for the glasses. It all looked natural. The hostess was engaged in a whispered conversation with the maid at the moment. The host and the other guests were finishing the exceedingly delicious patties on their plates, and the precious code

message was safely in evidence, red cross and all. They saw no reason to be suspicious about the stranger's hunt for his glasses.

"Oh, here they are!" he said, and put on the glasses to look more closely at the paper, spreading it out smoothly on the table-cloth before him, and wondering how he should get it into his lap in place of the one that now lay quietly under his napkin.

The host and the guests politely refrained from talking to Gordon, and told one another incidents of the day in low tones that indicated the non-importance of what they were saying.

Then the butler removed the plates, pausing beside Gordon to brush away the crumbs.

This was just what Gordon waited for. It had come to him as the only way. Courteously he drew aside, lifting the paper from the table and putting it in his lap, for just the instant while the butler did his work; but in that instant the paper with the red cross was slipped under the napkin, and the other paper took its place upon the table, back down, so that its lack of a red cross could not be noted.

So far, so good, but how long could this be kept up? And the paper under the napkin—how was it to be got into his pocket? His hands were like ice now, and his brain seemed to be at boiling heat as he sat back and realized that the deed was done, and could not be undone. If any one should pick up that paper from the table and discover the lack of the red mark, it would be all up with him. He looked up for an instant to meet the gaze of the six men upon him. They had nothing better to do now than to look at him until the next course arrived. He realized that not one of them would have mercy upon him if they knew what he had done, not one unless it might be the tired, old-looking one, and he would not dare interfere.

Still Gordon was enabled to smile, and to say some pleasant nothings to his hostess when she passed him the salted almonds. His hand lay carelessly guarding the secret of the paper on the table, innocently, as though it just *happened* that he laid it on the paper.

Sitting thus with the real paper in his lap, under his large damask napkin, the false paper under his hand on the table, where he from time to time perused it, and his eye-glasses, which made him look most distinguished, still on his nose, he heard the distant telephone bell ring.

He remembered the words of his chief and sat rigid. What should he do with the two papers?

He had but an instant to think until the well trained butler returned and announced that some one wished to speak with Mr. Burnham on the telephone. His resolve was taken. He would have to leave the substitute paper on the table. To carry it away with him might arouse suspicion, and, moreover, he could not easily manage both without being noticed. The real paper must be put safely away at all hazards,

and he must take the chance that the absence of the red mark would remain unnoticed until his return.

Deliberately he laid a heavy silver spoon across one edge of the paper on the table, and an ice-cream fork across the other, as if to hold it in place until his return. Then, rising with apologies, he gathered his napkin, paper and all, in his hand, holding it against his coat most naturally, as if he had forgotten that he had it, and made his way into the front hall, where in an alcove was the telephone booth. As he passed the hat-rack, he swept his coat and hat off with his free hand, and with sudden impulse strode straight to the front door.

The soft clink of spoons and dishes and the murmur of conversation covered the sound of his foot-steps. The sound of the door closing would be supposed to be the sound of the telephone-booth door. Cautiously, yet quickly, he turned the knob, opened the door, and slid through into the vestibule. His last glimpse of the room where he had but three minutes before been enjoying the hospitality of the house was a vision of the butler handing a dish to the head of the house. Even as he slid from sight, the man turned to come up the length of the table toward the hall door. A second more, and he would have been seen. Perhaps he had been. He shut the door silently, his nerves so tense that it seemed as if something must break soon; opened and shut the outer door, and was out in the great whirling city under the flare of electric lamps.

CHAPTER III.

GORDON came down the steps with the air of one who could scarcely take time to touch his feet to the ground, but must fly.

Almost in front of the house stood a closed carriage with two fine horses, but the coachman was looking up anxiously toward the next building. The sound of the closing door, though soft as Gordon could make it, drew the man's attention, and, catching Gordon's eye, he made as if to jump down and throw open the door of the carriage. Quick as a flash, Gordon saw he had been mistaken for the man the carriage awaited, and he determined to make use of the circumstance.

"Don't get down," he called to the man, taking chances. "It's very late already. I'll open the door. Drive for all you're worth." He jumped in and slammed the carriage door behind him, and in a second more the horses were flying down the street.

Gordon could scarcely believe his senses that he had accomplished his mission and flight unobserved and unfollowed. It was too good to be true.

Carefully rolling the paper into a tiny compass, he slipped it into a hollow gold case which was among the things in the envelope the chief had given him. There was a fine chain attached to the case, and the

whole looked innocently like a gold pencil. The chain he slipped about his neck, dropping the gold pencil down inside his collar. That done, he breathed more freely. Then he hastily put on the false eyebrows, mustache, and goatee which had been provided for his disguise. The napkin, which bore an embroidered H, he dropped out of the window.

He was just beginning to think what he should say to the driver about taking him to the station, for it was important that he get out of the city before his theft was discovered, when the carriage turned into a wide driveway, and halted. In the darkness he could not quite make out where he was. There seemed to be a high stone wall on one side, and on the other the light shone focussed from the doorway which evidently led into the side door of a church.

The coachman jumped down and flung open the door, and as it opened Gordon heard a man's voice say, "Where is the best man? Has n't he come either?" and another voice replied, "Oh, yes, here he is."

He gathered that he had been mistaken for a man who was part of a wedding party, the best man, who had been delayed. The carriage had no sooner stopped than it was surrounded by six excited ushers.

"Here you are at last!" they exclaimed in chorus. "Come on quickly. There is n't a minute to wait! The organist is fairly frantic. Everybody has been just as nervous as could be. We could n't very well go on without you, you know."

They literally bore him from the carriage up the tented walk and into a sort of chapel room adjoining the church. From the half-open door at the other side of the room he could hear the exquisite tones of the organ, and the fragrance of roses and lilies-of-the-valley filled the air. What should he do? If he could just slip into a side seat and make part of the audience, all would be well. It would be over soon, and he, mingling with the crowd, would be safe from detection, safer than anywhere else he could have gone. But best man! He never could carry that off in his present excited state. He had always declined such a position, any way, when his friends had asked him to officiate, and therefore had no experience to stand him in good stead. He held back. Of course they would soon discover that he was n't their man.

"Let me explain," he began, but they stopped him.

"There's no time for explanations now! They're beginning the wedding march. Don't you hear it? We're expected to be marching down the middle aisle to meet the bride this very minute. I sent the signal to the organist, and another to tell the bride you had come, the minute we sighted the carriage. Everybody knows the boat was late coming in. It must have been rough on you, being anxious like this, but never mind, it'll go all right now. Come on. Here's our cue, and there stands Jefferson over there. You and he go in with the min-

ister, you know—they'll tell you when. Jeff has the ring, so you won't need to bother about that. There's absolutely nothing for you to do but stand where they put you and go out when the rest do. You need n't feel a bit nervous."

"But I don't know anything about the arrangements," faltered Gordon, reflecting that probably the best man was not very well known to them, and perhaps he resembled him. It was not the first time he had been taken for another man, and his present make-up must be responsible for the likeness. If the real best man was missing, perhaps the easiest way to get out of it would be to bluff it out and *be* best man. He could slip away as soon as the ceremony was over, and the real best man would likely turn up after he was gone, and nobody would be injured thereby.

"Why, there are the usual arrangements, you know," said the hurried usher. "The groom and the best man—you and Jeff—go in after the ushers have reached the back of the church and opened the door. Then you just stand there till Celia and her uncle come up the aisle. Then follows the ceremony, and then you go out. It's all very simple. Leave your hat on that chair. Hurry! They're calling you, and all the other ushers have gone. Don't worry! You'll be all right, old man."

The breathless usher hurried through the door and settled into a sort of exalted hobble to the time of the wonderful Mendelssohn music. Gordon turned, thinking he might yet make his escape, but the man called Jefferson was by his side.

"Here we are," he said eagerly, grabbing Gordon's hat and coat and dumping them on a chair. "I'll look after everything. The Doctor is motioning for us. Awfully glad to see you at last. How many years is it since I saw you? Ten! You've changed some, but you're looking fine and dandy. No need to worry about anything. It'll soon be over and the knot tied."

Mechanically Gordon fell into place beside the man Jefferson, who was a pleasant-faced youth, well-groomed and handsome. Looking furtively at his finely-cut, happy features, Gordon wondered if he would feel as glad as this youth seemed to be, when he walked down the aisle to meet his bride. How, by the way, would he feel if he were going to be married now, going into the face of this great company of well dressed people to meet Miss Julia Bentley and be joined to her for life? Instinctively his soul shrank within him at the thought.

But now the door was wide open, the organ pealing its best, and he suddenly became aware of many eyes, and of wondering how long his eyebrows would withstand the perspiration that was trickling softly down his forehead. His mustache—was it awry? Dared he put up his hand to see? His gloves! Would any one notice that they were not as strictly fresh as a best man's gloves should be? Then he took his first

step to the music, and it was like being pulled from a delicious morning nap and plunged into a tub of icy water.

He walked with feet that suddenly weighed like lead, across a church that looked to be miles in width, in the face of swarms of curious eyes. He tried to reflect that these people were all strangers to him, that they were not looking at him, any way, but at the bridegroom by his side, and that it mattered very little what he did, so long as he kept still and braved it out, if only the real best man did n't turn up until he was well out of the church. Then he could vanish in the dark, and go by some back way to a car or a taxicab and so to the station. The thought of the paper inside the gold pencil-case filled him with a sort of elation. If only he could get out of this dreadful church, he would probably get away safely. Perhaps even the incident of the wedding might prove to be his protection, for they would never seek him at a fashionable wedding in a crowded church.

The man by his side managed him admirably, giving him a whispered hint, a shove, or a push now and then, and getting him into the proper position. It seemed as if the best man had to occupy the most trying spot in all the church, but as they put him there, of course it was right. He glanced furtively over the faces near the front, and they all looked quite satisfied, as if everything were going as it should, so he settled down to his fate, his white, strained face partly hidden by the abundant display of mustache and eyebrow. People whispered softly how handsome he looked, and some suggested that he was not so stout as when they had last seen him, ten years before. His stay in a foreign land must have done him good. One woman went so far as to tell her daughter that he was far more distinguished-looking than she had ever thought he could become, but it was wonderful what a stay in a foreign land would do to improve a person.

Slowly, gracefully, like the opening of buds into flowers, the bridal party inched along up the middle aisle until at last the bride in all the mystery of her white veil arrived, and all the maidens in their flowers and many colored gauzes were suitably disposed about her.

The feeble old man on whose arm the bride had leaned as she came up the aisle dropped out of the procession, melting into one of the front seats, and Gordon found himself standing beside the bride. He felt sure there must be something wrong, and he looked at his young guide with an attempt to change places with him, but the man named Jefferson held him in place with a warning eye. "You're all right. Just stay where you are," he whispered softly, and Gordon stayed, reflecting on the strange fashions of weddings, and wondering why he had never before taken notice of just how a wedding party came in and stood and got out again. It seemed one had to be a pretty all-round man to be a member of the secret service.

The organ had hushed its voice to a sort of exultant sobbing, filled with dreams of flowers and joys, and hints of sorrow; and the minister in a voice both impressive and musical began the ceremony. Gordon stood doggedly and wondered if that really was one eyebrow coming down over his eye, or only a drop of perspiration.

Another full second passed, and he decided that if he ever got out of this situation alive he would never, no, never, no, *never*, get married himself.

During the next second that crawled by he became supremely conscious of the creature in white by his side. A desire possessed him to look at her and see if she were like Julia Bentley. It was like a nightmare haunting his dreams that she *was* Julia Bentley, somehow transported to New York and being married to him willy-nilly. He could not shake it off, and the other eyebrow began to feel shaky. He was sure it was sailing down over his eye. If he only dared press its adhesive lining a little tighter to his flesh!

Some time during the situation there came a prayer, interminable to his excited imagination, like all the other ceremonies.

Under cover of the hush and the supposedly bowed heads, Gordon turned desperately toward the bride. He must see her and drive this phantasm from his brain. He turned, half expecting to see Julia's tall, handsome form, though telling himself he was a fool, and wondering why he so dreaded the idea. Then his gaze was held fascinated.

She was a little creature, slender and young and very beautiful, with a beauty which a deathly pallor only enhanced. Her face was delicately cut, and set in a frame of fine dark hair, the whole made most exquisite by the mist of white tulle that breathed itself about her like real mist over a flower. But the lovely head drooped, the coral lips had a look of unutterable sadness, and the long lashes swept over white cheeks. He could not take his eyes from her now that he had looked. How lovely, and how fitting for the delightful youth by his side! Now that he thought of it, she was like him, only smaller and more delicate, of course. A sudden fierce, ridiculous feeling of envy filled his heart. Why could n't he have known and loved a girl like that?

He looked at her with such intensity that a couple of dear old sisters who listened to the prayer with their eyes wide open, whispered one to the other: "Just see him look at her! How he must love her! Was n't it beautiful that he should come right from the steamer to the church and never see her till now, for the first time in ten long years. It's so romantic!"

"Yes," whispered the other; "and I believe it'll last."

A severe old lady in the seat in front turned a reprimanding chin toward them, and they subsided. Still Gordon continued to gaze.

Then the bride became aware of his look, and raised her eyes, and they were full of tears!

They gave him one reproachful glance that shot through his soul like a sword, and her lashes drooped again. By some mysterious control over the law of gravity, the tears remained unshed, and the man's gaze was turned aside, but that look had done its mighty work.

All the experiences of the day rushed over him and seemed to culminate in that one look. It was as if the reproach of all things had come upon him. The hurt in the white dog's eyes had touched him, the perfect courage in the appeal of the child's eyes had called forth his deepest sympathy, but the tears of this exquisite woman wrung his heart. He saw now that the appeal of the dog and the child had been the opening wedge for the look of a woman, which tore self from him and flung it at her feet for her to walk upon; and when the prayer was ended he found that he was trembling.

He looked vindictively at the innocent youth beside him, as the soft rustle of the audience and the little breath of relief from the bridal party betokened the next stage in the ceremony. What had this innocent-looking youth done to cause tears in those lovely eyes? Was she marrying him against her will? He was only a boy, any way. What right had he to suppose he could care for a delicate creature like that? He was making her cry already, and he seemed to be utterly unconscious of it. What could be the matter? Gordon felt a desire to kick him.

Then it occurred to him that inadvertently *he* might have been the cause of her tears; he, supposedly the best man, who had been late, and held up the wedding, no knowing how long. Of course it was n't really his fault; but by proxy it was, for he now was masquerading as that unlucky best man, and she was very likely reproaching him for what she supposed was his stupidity.

Yet in his heart he could not set those tears down to so trivial a cause. They had reached his soul, and he felt there was something deeper there than vexation. There had been bitter reproach for a deep wrong done. All the manhood in him rose to defend her against whoever had hurt her. He longed to get one more look into her eyes to make quite sure; and then, if there was still appeal there, his soul must answer it.

For the moment his commission, his ridiculous situation, the real peril to his life and trust, were forgotten.

The man Jefferson had produced a ring and was nudging him. It appeared that the best man had some part to play with that ring. He dimly remembered somewhere hearing that the best man must hand the ring to the bridegroom at the proper moment, but it was absurd for them to go through the farce of doing that when the bridegroom already held the golden circlet in his fingers? Why did he not step up like a

man and put it upon the outstretched hand; that little white hand just in front of him there, so timidly held out with its glove fingers tucked back, like a dove crept out from its cover?

But the Jefferson-man still held out the ring stupidly to him, and evidently expected him to take it. Silly youth! There was nothing for it but to take it and hand it back, of course. He must do as he was told and hasten that awful ceremony to its interminable close. He took the ring and held it out, but the young man did not take it again. Instead he whispered, "Put it on her finger!"

Gordon frowned. Could he be hearing aright? Why did n't the fellow put the ring on his own bride? If he were being married, he would knock any man down that dared to put his wife's wedding ring on for him. Could that be the silly custom now, to have the best man put the bride's ring on? How unutterably out of place! But he must not make a scene.

The little timid hand, so slender and white, came a shade nearer, as if to help, and the ring finger separated itself from the others.

He looked at the smooth circlet. It seemed too tiny for any woman's finger. Then, reverently, he slipped it on, with a strange, inexpressible longing to touch the little hand. While he was thinking himself all kinds of a fool, and was enjoying one of his intermittent visions of Julia Bentley's expressive countenance interpolated on the present scene, a strange thing happened.

There had been some low murmurs and motions which he had not noticed because he thought his part of this very uncomfortable affair was about concluded, when, lo and behold, the minister and the young man by his side both began fumbling for his hand, and among them they managed to bring it into position and place in its astonished grasp the little timid hand that he had just crowned with its ring.

As his fingers closed over the bride's hand, there was such reverence, such tenderness, in his touch that the girl's eyes were raised once more to his face, this time with the conquered tears in retreat, but all the pain and appeal still there. He looked and involuntarily he pressed her hand the closer, as if to promise aforesaid whatever she would ask. Then, with her hand in his, and with the realization that they two were detached, as it were, from the rest of the wedding party, standing in a little centre of their own, his senses came back to him, and he perceived as in a flash of understanding that it was *they* who were being married.

There had been some terrible, unexplainable mistake, and he was stupidly standing in another man's place, taking life vows upon himself! The thing had passed from an adventure of little moment into a matter of a life-tragedy—two life-tragedies perhaps! What should he do?

With the question came the words, "I pronounce you husband and wife," and "Let no man put asunder."

What had he done? Was it some great unnamed, unheard-of crime he had unconsciously committed? Could any one understand or excuse such asinine stupidity? Could he ever hold up his head again, though he fled to the most distant part of the globe? Was there nothing that could save the situation? Now, before they left the church, could he not declare the truth, and set things right, undo the words that had been spoken in the presence of all these witnesses, and send out to find the real bridegroom? Surely neither law nor gospel could endorse a bond made in the ignorance of either participant. It would, of course, be a terrible thing for the bride, but better now than later. Besides, he was pledged by that hand-clasp to answer the appeal in her eyes and protect her. This, then, was what it had meant!

But his commission! What of that? "A matter of life and death"! Ah, but this was *more* than life or death!

While these rapid thoughts were flashing through his brain, the benediction was being pronounced, and with the last word the organ pealed forth its triumphant lay. The audience stirred excitedly, anticipating the final view of the wedding procession.

The bride turned to take her bouquet from the maid of honor, and the movement broke the spell under which Gordon had been held.

He turned to the young man by his side.

"An awful mistake has been made," he said, and the organ drowned everything but the word "mistake." - "I don't know what to do," he went on. But young Jefferson hastened to reassure him joyously:

"Not a bit of it, old chap. Nobody noticed that hitch about the ring. It was only a second. Everything went off slick. You haven't anything more to do now but take my sister out. Look alive, there! She might be going to faint! She has n't been a bit well all day!

Gordon turned in alarm. Already the frail white bride had a claim on him. His first duty was to get her out of this crowd. Perhaps, after all, she had discovered that he was not the right man, and that was the meaning of her tears and appeal. Yet she had held her own and allowed things to go through to the finish, and perhaps he had no right to reveal to the assembled multitude what she evidently wanted kept quiet. He must wait till he could ask her. He must do as this other man said—this—this brother of hers—who was of course the best man. Oh, fool, and blind! Why had he not understood at the beginning and got himself out of this fix before it was too late? And what should he do when he reached the door? How could he ever explain? His commission! He dared not breathe a word of that? What explanation could he possibly offer for his—his—yes—his *criminal* conduct? Why, no such thing was ever heard of in the history of mankind as that which had happened to him. From start to finish it was—it—was—— He could not think of words to express what it was.

He was by this time meandering jerkily down the aisle, attempting to keep time to the music and look the part that she evidently expected him to play, but his eyes were upon her face, which was whiter now and, if possible, lovelier, than before.

"Oh, just see how devoted he is," murmured the eldest of the two dear old sisters, and he caught the sense of her words as he passed, and wondered. Then, immediately before him, retreating backward down the aisle, with terrible eyes of scorn upon him, he seemed to feel the presence of Miss Julia Bentley leading onward toward the church door; but he would not take his eyes from that sweet, sad face of the white bride on his arm to look. He somehow knew that if he could hold out until he reached that door without looking up, Julia Bentley's power over him would be exorcised forever.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY reached the vestibule at last, and he felt his bride's gentle weight grow heavy on his arm. Instinctively, lest others should gather around them, he almost lifted her and bore her down the carpeted steps, through the covered pathway, to the luxurious motor-car waiting with open door, and placed her on the cushions. Some one closed the car door, and almost immediately they were in motion. Her eyes were closed wearily, and the whole droop of her figure showed utter exhaustion. It seemed a desecration to speak to her, yet he must have some kind of an understanding before they reached their destination.

"An explanation is due to you——" he began; but she put out her hand with a weary protest.

"Oh, please don't!" she pleaded. "I know—the boat was late. It does n't matter in the least."

"But you don't understand," he protested.

"Never mind," she moaned. "I don't want to understand. Nothing can change things now. Only, let me be quiet till we get to the house, or I never can go through with the rest of it."

Her words ended with almost a sob, and he sat silent for an instant, with a mingling of emotions, uppermost of which was a desire to take the little, white, shrinking girl into his arms and comfort her, she looked so small and sad and misty huddled beside her great bouquet.

"Very well." He said it quietly, and sat back with folded arms.

Thus silently they threaded through unknown streets, strange thoughts in the heart of each. Gordon tried to set his thoughts in order and find out just what to do. First of all, he set up the thought of his commission, but somehow every time the little white bride opposite took first place in his mind. He must do the best he could for the girl who had so strangely crossed his pathway. When he tried to realize the

importance of his commission and set it over against the interests of the girl-bride, his mind became confused. What should he do? He could not think of slipping away and leaving her without further words, even if an opportunity offered itself. Perhaps he was wrong. Doubtless his many friends might tell him so if they were consulted, but he did not intend to consult them. One thing he did not fully realize, and that was that Miss Julia Bentley's vision troubled him no longer. He was free. There was only one woman in the whole wide world that gave him any concern, and that was the little sorrowful creature who sat opposite to him, and to whom he had just been married.

Just been married! He! The thought brought with it a thrill of wonder, and a something else that was not unpleasant. What if he really had? Of course he hadn't. Of course such a thing could n't hold good. But what if he had? Just for an instant he entertained the thought. Would he be glad or sorry? He did n't know her, of course, had heard her speak but a few words, had looked into her face plainly but once, and yet suppose she were his! His heart answered the question with a glad bound that astonished him, and all his former ideas of real love were swept from his mind in a breath. He knew that, stranger though he was, he could take her to his heart and cherish her and love her and bear with her, as he never could have Miss Bentley. Then all at once he realized that he was allowing his thoughts to dwell upon a woman who by all that was holy belonged to another man, and that other man would doubtless soon be the one with whom he would have to deal. What was he going to do? Should he plan to escape from the opposite door of the automobile while the bride was being assisted from her seat? No, there would be too many around, and he could not possibly get away. But, greater than any such reason, the thing that held him bound was the look in her eyes through the tears. He simply could not leave her until he knew that she no longer needed him. And yet there was his commission! If he only could explain to her now! But, after all, what could he say that would not give away his important errand?

The thought of that message, with its terrible significance, safe in his possession, sent shivers of anxiety through his frame! Suppose he should be caught, and it taken from him, all on account of this most impossible incident! What scorn, what contumely, would be his! How could he ever explain to his chief? Would anybody living believe that a man in his senses could be married to a stranger before a whole churchful of people, and not know he was being married until the deed was done—and then not do anything about it after it was done?

The car halted suddenly before a brightly lighted mansion, whose tented entrance effectually shut out the gaze of alien eyes, and made the transit from car to domicile entirely private. There was no oppor-

tunity here to disappear. He stepped from the car first and helped the lady out. He bore her heavy bouquet because she looked literally too frail to carry it further herself.

In the doorway she was surrounded by a bevy of servants, foremost of whom her old nurse claimed the privilege of greeting her with tears and smiles and many "Miss-Celia-my-dears," and Gordon, entranced, watched the sweet play of loving kindness in the face of the pale little bride.

The old nurse stepped back to let the other servants greet the bride, and laid her hand on Gordon's arm.

"Mister George, ye hev n't forgot me, hev ye?" she asked earnestly. "You use n't to like me verra well, I mind, but ye was awful for the teasin', an' I was always for my Miss Celie! But bygones is bygones. Yer growed a man, an' I know ye must be worthy o' her, or she'd never hev consented to take ye. Ye won't hold it against me, Mister George, that I used to tell yer uncle on your masterful tricks. You mind I was only carin' fer my baby girl, an' ye were but a boy."

She paused as if expecting an answer, and Gordon embarrassedly assured her that he would never think of holding so trifling a matter against her. He cast a look of reverent admiration and tenderness toward the beautiful girl who was smiling on her loyal subjects like a queen.

"Ah, ye luv her, Mister George, don't ye?" said the nurse. "I don't wonder. Everybody luv her. She's that dear——"

Then suddenly Gordon found his lips uttering strange words, without his own apparent consent, as if his heart had suddenly taken things in hand and determined to do as it pleased, without consulting his judgment.

"Yes, I love her," he was saying, and to his amazement he found that the words were true.

This discovery made matters still more complicated.

"Then ye'll promise me something, Mister George, won't ye?" said the nurse eagerly. "Ye'll promise me never to make her feel bad any more? She's cried a lot these last three months, an' nobody knows but me. She could hide it from them all but her old nurse that has loved her so long. But she's been that sorrowful, enough fer a whole lifetime. Promise that ye'll make her happy always."

"I will do all in my power to make her happy," he said solemnly, as if he were uttering a vow, and wondered how short-lived that power was to be.

The wedding party had arrived in full force now. Carriages and automobiles were unloading, and gay voices and laughter filled the house. The servants disappeared to their places, and the white bride, with only a motioning look toward Gordon, led the way to the place where they

were to stand under an arch of roses and lilies and palms, in a room hung from the ceiling with drooping ferns and white carnations on invisible threads of silver wire, until it all seemed like a fairy dream.

Gordon had no choice but to follow. As he stepped into the mystery of the flower-scented room where his lady led the way, he was conscious of a feeling of transition from the world of ordinary things into one of wonder and beauty and mysterious joy; but all the time he knew he was an impostor, who had no right in that silver-threaded bower.

Yet there he stood bowing, shaking hands, and smirking behind his false mustache, which threatened every minute to betray him.

People told him he was looking well, and congratulated him on his bride. Some said he was stouter than when he left the country, and some said he was thinner. They asked him questions about relatives and friends living and dead, and he ran constant risk of getting into hopeless difficulties. His only safety was in smiling, and saying very little. It was not so hard after he got started, because there were so many people, and they kept coming close upon one another, so no one had much time to talk. The supper with its formalities was got through with somehow, though to Gordon, with his already satisfied appetite and his hampering mustache, it seemed an endless ordeal.

"Jeff," as they all called him, was everywhere, attending to everything, and he slipped up to the unwilling bridegroom just as he was having to answer a very difficult question about the lateness of his vessel, and the kind of passage they had experienced in crossing. By this time Gordon had discovered that he was supposed to have been ten years abroad, and his steamer had been late in landing, but where he came from or what he had been doing over there was still to be found out. Besides all this, Gordon was just reflecting that the last he had seen of his hat and coat was in the church. What had become of them, and how he could go to the station at this time of night without a hat? Then opportunely "Jeff" arrived.

"Your train leaves at ten three," he said in a low, business-like tone, as if he enjoyed the importance of having made all the arrangements. "I've secured the state-room as you cabled me to do, and here are the tickets and checks. The trunks are down there all checked. Celia did n't want any nonsense about their being tied up with white satin ribbon. She hates all that. We've arranged for you to slip out by the fire-escape and down through the back yard of the next neighbor, where a motor, just a plain regular one from the station, will be waiting around the corner in the shadow. Celia knows where it is. None of the party will know you are gone until you are well under way. The car they think you will take is being elaborately adorned with white at the front door now. Your coat and hat are out on the fire-escape, and as soon as Celia's ready I'll show you the way."

Gordon thanked him. There was nothing else to do, but his countenance grew blank. Was there, then, to be no escape? Must he actually take another man's bride with him in order to get away? And how was he to get away from her? To leave her alone, ill and distressed, was out of the question. He had rid himself of a lonely dog and a suffering child, but leave this lovely woman for whom he at least appeared to have become responsible, he could not, until he was sure she would come to no harm through him.

"Don't let anything hinder you! Don't let anything hinder you!"

It appeared that this refrain had not ceased for an instant since it began. It acted like a goad upon his conscience now. He must do something that would set him free to go back to Washington. An inspiration came to him.

"Would n't you like to go to the station with us?" he asked the young man. "I am sure your sister would like to have you."

The boy's face lit up joyfully.

"Oh, would n't you mind? I'd like it awfully, and—if it's all the same to you, I wish Mother could go too. It's the first time Celia and she were ever separated, and I know she hates it fiercely to have to say good-by with the house full of folks this way."

"I shall be glad to have you both come," Gordon added earnestly. "I really want you. Tell your mother."

The boy grasped his hand impulsively.

"I say," said he, "you're all right! I don't mind confessing that I've hated the very thought of you for a whole three months, ever since Celia told us she had promised to marry you. You see, I never really knew you when I was a little chap. I suppose kids often take irrational dislikes like that. But ever since I laid eyes on you to-night, I've liked you all the way through. I like your eyes. It is n't a bit as I thought I remembered you. I used to think your eyes had a sort of deceitful look. Awful to tell you, is n't it? But I felt as if I wanted to have it off my conscience, for I see now you're nothing of the kind. You've got the honestest eyes I ever saw on a man. You're true as steel, and I'm mighty glad you're my brother-in-law. I know you'll be good to Celia."

The slow color mounted under Gordon's disguise until it reached his burnished brown hair. His eyes *were* honest ones. They had always been so—until to-day. Into what a world of deceit he had entered! How he would like to make a clean breast of it all to this nice, frank boy; but he must not! For there was his trust! For an instant he was on the point of trying to explain that he was not the true bridegroom, and getting young Jefferson to help him to set matters right, but an influx of newly arrived guests broke in upon their privacy.

It was over at last, and the bride slipped from his side to prepare

for the journey. He looked hastily around, feeling that his very first opportunity had come for making an escape. If an open window had presented itself, he would have vaulted through, trusting to luck and his heels to get away; but there was no window, and every door was blocked by staring, admiring, smirking people. He bethought himself of the fire-escape, where waited his hat and coat, and wondered if he could find it.

With smiling apologies, he broke away from those around him, murmuring something about being needed, and worked his way firmly but steadily toward the stairs and thence to the back halls. Coming at last upon an open window, he slipped through, his heart beating wildly, and thinking for a second that he was there ahead of the others; but a dark form loomed ahead, and he perceived some one coming up from outside. Another second, and he saw it was his newly acquired brother-in-law.

"Say, this is great!" was his greeting. "How did you manage to find your way up alone? I was just coming down after you. I just took Mother and Celia down. It was pretty stiff for Mother to climb down, for she was a little bit afraid, but she was game all right, and she was so pleased to go. Now I'll pull down this window so no one will suspect us and follow. You go ahead. Just hold on to the railing and go slowly. I'll keep close to you. I've played fire here many a year, and could climb down in my sleep."

There was evidently to be no opportunity of escape here. Gordon meditated making a dash and getting away in the dark when they should reach the foot of the stairs; the car that was to take them to the station was drawn up close to the spot, and the chauffeur stood beside it.

"Your mother says fer you to hurry, Mister Jefferson," he called in a sepulchral tone. "They're coming out around the block to watch. Get in as quick as you can."

They were very quiet until they had left the dark court and were speeding away down the avenue. Then the bride's mother laid two gentle hands upon Gordon's, leaning across from her seat to do so, and said:

"My son, I shall never forget this of you, never! It was dear of you to give me these last few minutes with my darling!"

Gordon, deeply touched and much put to it for words, mumbled something about being very glad to have her, and Jefferson relieved the situation by pouring forth a volume of information and questions, fortunately not pausing long enough to have the latter answered. The bride sat with one hand clasped in her mother's, and said not a word. Gordon was haunted by the thought of tears in her eyes.

There was little opportunity for thinking, but Gordon made a hasty plan. He decided to get his party all out to the train and then

remember his suit-case, which he had left checked in the station. Then he could get away in the crowd and disappear. It seemed a dishonorable way to leave these people, who would in the nature of things be left in a most trying position by his disappearance, but it could not be helped. After his message was delivered he could confess and make whatever reparation a man in his strange position could render.

The plan worked very well at the start. The brother of course eagerly urged that he be allowed to go back for the suit-case, but Gordon, with well-feigned thoughtfulness, said in a low tone:

"Your sister will want you for a minute all to herself."

A tender look came into the boy's eyes, and he turned back smiling to the state-room where his mother and sister were having a wordless farewell. Gordon jumped from the train and sprinted down the platform, feeling meaner than he remembered ever to have felt in his whole life, and with a strange heaviness about his heart. He forgot for the moment that there was need for him to be on his guard against possible detectives sent by Mr. Holman. Even the importance of the message he carried seemed to weigh less, now that he was free. His feet had a strange unwillingness to hurry, and without a constant pressure of the will would have lagged in spite of him. His heart wanted to let suit-case and commission and everything else go to the winds and take him back to the state-room where he had left his sorrowful bride of an hour. She was not his, and he might not go, but he knew that he would never be the same hereafter. He would always be wondering where she was, wishing he could have saved her from whatever troubled her; wishing she was his bride, and not another's.

He passed back through the station gate, and a man in evening clothes eyed him sharply. He fancied he saw a resemblance to one of the men at the Holman dinner-table, but he dared not look again, lest a glance should cost him recognition. He was hurrying off toward the street door when a voice that was strangely welcome shouted:

"This way, George! The checking place is over to the right."

He turned and there stood Jefferson, smiling and panting:

"You see, the little mother had something to say to Celia alone, so I saw I was *de trop*, and thought I'd better come with you," he declared as soon as he could get his breath.

"Gee, but you can run!" added the panting youth. "What's the hurry? It's ten whole minutes before the train leaves. I could n't waste all that time kicking my heels on the platform, when I might be enjoying my new brother-in-law's company. I say, are you really going to live permanently in Chicago? I do wish you'd decide to come back to New York. Mother'll miss Celia no end. I don't know how she's going to stand it."

Walking airily by Gordon's side, he talked, apparently not noticing

the sudden start and look of mingled anxiety and relief that overspread his brother-in-law's countenance. Once a man walked by them and then turned and looked in their faces. Gordon was sure now it was the young fellow with unscrupulous eyes, from Holman's. Suddenly all other questions stepped into the background, and the only immediate matter that concerned him was his message, to get it safely to its destination.

But the time of danger was at hand, he plainly saw. The man had turned again and was walking parallel to them, glancing now and again keenly in their direction.

There was a moment's delay at the checking counter while the attendant searched for the suit-case, and Gordon was convinced that the man had stopped a few steps away for the purpose of watching him.

He dared not look around or notice the man, but he was sure he followed them back to the train.

But Gordon was cool and collected now. It was as if the experience of the last two hours, with their embarrassing predicaments, had been wiped off the calendar, and he were back at the moment when he left the Holman house. He knew as well as if he had watched them follow him that they had discovered his—theft—treachery—whatever it ought to be called—and he was being searched for; and because of what was at stake, those men would track him to death if they could. But he knew also that his disguise and his companion were puzzling this sleuth-hound for the moment.

This was probably not the only watcher about the station. There were detectives, too, perhaps, hired hastily, and all too ready to seize a suspect.

He marvelled that he could walk so deliberately at so momentous a time. He smiled and talked easily with the pleasant fellow who walked by his side, and answered his questions with very little idea of what he was saying.

Thus they entered the train and came to the car where the bride and her mother waited. There were tears on the face of the girl, and she turned to the window to hide them. Gordon's eyes followed her wistfully, and down through the double glass, unnoticed by her absent gaze, he saw the face of the man who had followed them.

Realizing that his hat was a partial disguise, he kept it on in spite of the presence of the ladies. The color rose in his cheeks because he had to seem so discourteous, and, to cover his embarrassment, he insisted that he be allowed to take the elder lady to the platform, as it really was almost time for the train to start, and so he went deliberately out to act the part of bridegroom in the face of his recognized foe.

The mother and Gordon stood for a moment on the vestibule platform, while Jefferson bade his sister good-by and tried to soothe her distress at parting from her mother.

"He's all right, Celie, indeed he is," said the young fellow caressingly, laying his hand upon his sister's bowed head. "He's going to be awfully good to you, and he's promised to do all sorts of nice things. He says he would like nothing better than to have us all live together. He did indeed! What do you think of that?"

Celia tried to look up and smile through her tears, while the man outside studied the situation a moment in perplexity and then walked slowly over to watch Gordon and the elder woman.

"You will be good to my little girl," he heard the woman's voice pleading. "She has always been guarded, and she will miss us all, even though she has you." The voice went through Gordon like a knife. To stand much more of this and not denounce himself for a blackguard would be impossible. Neither could he keep his hat on in the presence of this wonderful motherhood, a motherhood that appealed to him all the more that he had never known a mother of his own, and had always longed for one.

He put his hand up and lifted his hat slightly, guarding as much as possible his own face from the view of the man on the station platform, who was still walking up and down, often passing near enough to hear what they were saying. In this reverent attitude Gordon said, as though he were uttering a sacred vow:

"I will guard her as if she were—as if I were—as if I were—you"—then he paused a moment and added solemnly, tenderly—"Mother!"

He wondered if it were not desecration to utter such words when all the time he was utterly unable to perform them in the way in which the mother meant. "Impostor" was the word which rang in his ears now. The clamor about being hindered had ceased, for he was doing his best, and not letting even a woman's happiness stand in the way of his duty.

Yet his heart had dictated the words he had spoken, while his mind and judgment were busy with his perilous position. He could not gain-say his heart, for he felt that in every way he could he would guard and care for the frail girl who was to be in his keeping at least until he could contrive some way to get her back to her friends without him.

The whistle of the train was sounding now, and the brakemen were shouting, "All aboard!"

He helped the frail little, elderly woman down the steps, and she reached up her face to kiss him. He bent and took the caress, the first that a woman's lips had touched his face since he was a little child.

"Mother, I will not let anything harm her," he whispered, and she said:

"My boy, I can trust you!"

Then he put her into the care of her strong young son, swung back upon the train as the wheels began to move, and hurried back to the

bride. On the platform, walking beside the train, he still saw the man. Going to the weeping girl, Gordon stooped over her gently, touched her on the shoulder, and drew the window-shade down. The last face he saw outside was the face of the baffled man, who was turning back.

CHAPTER V.

THEN, without warning, a new situation was thrust upon Gordon. The bride, who had been standing with bowed head and with her handkerchief up to her eyes, tottered and fell into his arms, limp and white. Instantly all his senses were called into action, and he forgot the man on the platform, forgot the possible next stop in the city, and the explanation he had been about to make to the girl; forgot even the importance of his mission, and the fact that the train he was on was headed toward Chicago, instead of Washington; forgot everything but the fact that the loveliest girl he had ever seen, with the saddest look a human face might wear, was lying apparently lifeless in his arms.

Outside the window the man had turned back and was now running excitedly along with the train, trying to see into the window; and down the platform, not ten yards behind, came striding angrily along a frantic man with English-looking clothes, a heavy mustache and goatee, shaggy eyebrows, and a sensual face.

But Gordon saw none of them.

Five hours before, the man who was hurling himself furiously after the rapidly retreating train had driven calmly through the city, from the pier of the White Star Line to the apartments of a man whom he had met abroad, and who had offered him the use of them during his absence. The rooms were in the fourth story of a fine apartment house. The returning exile noted with satisfaction the irreproachable neighborhood, and he slowly descended from the carriage, paid his fee, and entered the door, to present his letter of introduction to the janitor.

His first act was to open the steamer trunk which he had brought with him in the cab, and take therefrom his wedding garments, which he carefully arranged on folding hangers and hung in the closet.

Then he hastened to the telephone and communicated with his best man, Jefferson Hathaway; told him the boat was late arriving at the dock, but that he was here at last; gave him a few directions concerning errands he would like to have done, and agreed to be at the church a half-hour earlier than the time set for the ceremony, to be shown just what arrangements had been made. He asked after his bride, was told that she was feeling very tired and was resting, and agreed that it would as well not to disturb her. He asked if the ring had been purchased, as he had requested, and gave a final direction about the carriage that was to be sent for him.

He hung up the receiver and went out to refresh himself at the nearest bar, just to brace himself for the coming ordeal, which was to bind to him for life a woman who had always feared him, and whom he hated because she had dared to scorn him. He felt elated with a kind of fierce joy that at last he had her in his power.

Returning to his room, he made a smug and leisurely toilet, with a smile of satisfaction upon his flabby face. He posed a moment before the mirror to smooth his mustache and note how well he was looking. Then he went to the closet for his coat.

It was most peculiar, the way it happened, but somehow, as he stepped into the closet to take down his coat, which hung at the back, where the space was widest, the opening at the wrist of his shirt-sleeve caught for just an instant in the little knob of the closet latch. The gold button which held the cuff to the wristband slipped its hold, and the man was free almost at once, but the angry twitch he had made at the slight detention had given the door an impetus which set it silently moving on its hinges. He had scarcely put his hand upon his wedding coat when a soft click, followed by utter darkness, warned him that his impatience had entrapped him. He put out his hand and pushed at the door, but the catch had settled into place. It was a very strong, neat little catch, and it did its work well. The man was a prisoner.

At first he was only annoyed, and gave the door an angry kick or two, as if of course it would presently release him meekly; but then he bethought him of his polished wedding shoes, and desisted. He tried to find a knob and shake the door, but the only knob was the tiny brass one on the outside of the catch, and you cannot shake a plain surface reared up before you. Then he set his massive shoulder against the door and pressed with all his might, till his bulky linen shirt-front creaked with dismay, and his wedding collar wilted limply. But the door stood like adamant. It was massive, like the man, but it was not flabby. The wood of which it was composed had spent its early life in the open, drinking only the wine of sunshine and sparkling air, wet with the dews of heaven, and exercising against the north blast. It was nothing for it to hold out against this pillow of a man, who had been nurtured in the dissipation and folly of a great city. The door held its own, and, if doors do such things, the face of it must have laughed to the silent room; and who knows but the room winked back? It would be but natural that a room should resent a new occupant in the absence of a beloved owner.

He was there, safe and fast, in the still dark, with plenty of time for reflection. And there were things in his life that called for his reflection. They had never had him at a disadvantage before.

In due course of time, having exhausted his breath and strength in

fruitless pushing, and his vocabulary in foolish curses, he lifted up his voice and roared. No other word would quite describe the sound that issued from his mighty throat. But the city roared placidly below him, and no one minded him in the least.

He sacrificed the shiny toes of his shoes and added resounding kicks on the door to the general hubbub. He changed the roar to a bellow like a mad bull, but still the silence that succeeded it was as deep and monotonous as ever. He tried going to the back of the closet and hurling himself against the door, but he only hurt his soft muscles with the effort. Finally he sat down on the floor of the closet.

Now, the janitor's wife, who occupied an apartment somewhat overcrowded, had surreptitiously borrowed the use of this closet the week before, in order to hang therein her Sunday gown, whose front breadth was covered with grease-spots thickly overlaid with French chalk. The French chalk had done its work and removed the grease-spots, and now lay thickly on the floor of the closet, but the imprisoned bridegroom did not know that, and he sat down quite naturally to rest from his unusual exertions, and to reflect on what could be done next.

The immediate present passed rapidly in review. He could not afford more than ten minutes to get out of this hole. He ought to be on the way to the church at once. There was no knowing what nonsense Celia might get into her head if he delayed. He had known her since her childhood, and she had always scorned him. The hold he had upon her now was like a rope of sand, but only he knew that. If he could but knock that old door down! If he only had n't hung up his coat in the closet! If the man who built the house only had n't put such a fool catch on the door! When he got out he would take time to chop it off! If only he had a little more room and a little more air! It was stifling! Great beads of perspiration went rolling down his hot forehead, and his wet collar made a cool band about his neck. He wondered if he had another clean collar of that particular style with him. If he *only* could get out of this accursed place! Where were all the people? Why was everything so still? Would they never come and let him out?

He reflected that he had told the janitor he would occupy the room with his baggage for two or three weeks perhaps, but that he expected to go away on a trip this very evening. The janitor would not think it strange if he did not appear. How would it be to stay here and die? Horrible thought!

He jumped up from the floor and began his howlings and gyrations once more, but soon desisted, and sat down to be entertained by a panorama of his past life, which is always unpleasantly in evidence at such times. Fine and clear in the darkness of the closet stood out the nicely laid scheme of deviltry by which he had contrived to be at least within reach of a coveted fortune. He must have that fortune, for he

was deep in debt, and—but then he would refuse to think, and get up to batter at his prison door again.

Four hours his prison walls enclosed him, with inky blackness all around, save, as the night outside drew on, a faint glimmer of light which marked the well fitted base of the door. He had lighted the gas when he began dressing. Sometimes it seemed as if that streak of flickering gas-light was the only thing that held him from losing his mind. The rage in which his situation threw him was exhausting beyond words, and he felt sure he was dying when at last the janitor came up on his round of inspection, noticed the light flaring from the transom over the door occupied by the stranger who had said he was going to leave on a trip immediately, and went in to investigate. The man in the closet lost no time in making his presence known, and the janitor let him out, after having received promise of a reward which never materialized.

The stranger dashed about the room like an insane creature, tearing off his wilted collar, grabbing at another, jerking on his fine coat, snatching his hat and overcoat, and making off down the stairs, regardless of the demand of the janitor for the fee he had been promised.

He rushed to the telephone office and called up both the house of his affianced bride and the church, but when he could get no satisfactory answer he flew hither and thither blindly in search of some conveyance. He found a taxicab at last, and, plunging in, ordered it to go at once to the Hathaway address.

Arrived there, he presented an enlivening spectacle to the guests, who were still making merry. His trousers were covered with French chalk, his collar had slipped from its confining button in front and curved gracefully about one fat cheek, his high hat was a crush indeed, having been rammed down to his head in his excitement. He talked so fast and so loud that they thought he was crazy and tried to put him out, but he shook his fist angrily in the face of the footman and demanded to know where Miss Hathaway was? When they told him she was married and gone, he turned livid with wrath and told them that that was impossible, as he was the bridegroom.

By this time the guests had gathered in curious groups in the hall and on the stairs, listening, and when he claimed to be the bridegroom they shouted with laughter, thinking this must be some practical joke or else that the man was insane.

George looked around on the company with helpless rage, then rushed to his taxicab and gave the order for the Union Station.

Arriving there, he dashed up the platform, overcoat streaming from his arm, coat-tails flying, hat crushed down upon his head. He passed Jefferson and his mother. The mother was saying wistfully, "I think he'll be good to her, don't you, Jeff? He has nice eyes." Then they

turned and went back to their car, and the train rushed out into the night.

Gordon had never before held anything so precious, so sweet and beautiful and frail-looking, in his arms. He had a feeling that he ought to lay her down, yet there was a longing to draw her closer to himself and shield her from everything that could trouble her.

But she was not his—only a precious trust to be guarded as carefully as the message he carried hidden about his neck, until circumstances made it possible for him to return her to her rightful husband. Just what all this might mean to himself, to the woman in his arms, and to the man whom she was to have married, Gordon has not as yet had time to think.

He laid her gently on the long couch of the drawing-room and opened the little door of the private dressing-room. There would be cold water in there.

He knew very little about caring for sick people—he had always been well and strong himself—but cold water was what they used for people who had fainted, he was sure. He would not call in any one to help, unless it was absolutely necessary. As he passed the mirror, he started at the curious vision of himself. One false eyebrow had come loose and was hanging over his eye, and his goatee was crooked. Had it been so all the time? He snatched the eyebrow off, and then the other; but the mustache and goatee were more tightly affixed, and it was very painful to remove them. He glanced back, and the white, limp look of the girl on the couch frightened him. He tore the false hair roughly from him, and, stuffing it into his pocket, filled a glass and went back to the couch. His chin and upper lip smarted, but he did not notice it, nor know that the mark of the plaster was all about his face. He only knew that she lay there apparently lifeless before him, and he must bring the soul back into those dear eyes. It was strange, wonderful, how dear had grown the girl whom he had never seen till three short hours before.

He held the glass to her white lips and tried to make her drink, then poured water on his handkerchief and awkwardly bathed her forehead. Some hair-pins slipped loose and a great wealth of golden-brown hair fell across his knees as he half knelt beside her. One little hand drooped over the side of the couch and touched his. He started! It seemed so soft and cold and lifeless.

He slipped his arm tenderly under her head and tried to raise it so that she could drink, but the white lips did not move nor attempt to swallow.

Then a panic seized him. Suppose she was dying? Not until later, when he had quiet and opportunity for thought, did it occur to him what a terrible responsibility he had dared to take upon himself in letting

them leave her with him; what a fearful position he would have been in if she had died.

Forgetting his own need of quiet and obscurity, he laid her gently back upon the couch again, and rushed out to the conductor.

"Is there a doctor on board, or have you any restoratives? There is a lady——" He hesitated and the color rolled freshly into his anxious face. "That is, my wife is ill—unconscious."

The conductor looked at him sharply. He had sized them up as a wedding party when they came down the platform toward the train. The young man's blush confirmed his supposition.

"I'll see," he said briefly. "Go back to her, and I'll bring some one."

Gordon went back and stood looking helplessly down at the delicate creature as she lay there so helpless. Her pretty travelling gown set off the exquisite face, her glorious hair seemed to crown her. A handsome hat had fallen unheeded to the floor. He picked it up reverently, as though it had been a part of her.

The conductor hurried in, followed by a grave, elderly man with a professional air.

The physician knelt beside the girl, touching a practised finger to her limp wrist, applying restoratives, and chafing her hands, until with a long breath that was scarcely more than a sigh, the blue eyes opened.

She looked about, bewildered, looking longest at Gordon, then closed her eyes wearily, as if she wished they had not brought her back, and lay still.

The physician still knelt beside her, and Gordon, with time now to think, began to reflect on the possible consequences of his deeds. With anxious face, he stood watching, reflecting bitterly that he might not claim even a look of recognition from those sweet eyes.

The physician ordered the porter to make up the berth immediately. Then with skilful hands and strong arms he laid the young girl in upon the pillows and made her comfortable, Gordon meanwhile standing awkwardly by with averted eyes and troubled mien. He would have liked to help, but he did not know how.

"She'd better not be disturbed any more than is necessary to-night," said the doctor, as he pulled the pretty cloth travelling gown smoothly down about the girl's ankles. "Don't let her yield to any nonsense about putting up her hair, or taking off that frock for fear she'll rumple it. She needs to lie perfectly quiet. It's a case of utter exhaustion, and I should say a long strain of some kind—anxiety, worry, perhaps." He looked keenly at the sheepish bridegroom. "Has she had any trouble?"

Gordon lifted honest eyes.

"I'm afraid so," he answered contritely, as if it must have been his fault some way.

"Well, don't let her have any more," said the elder man briskly. "She's a very fragile bit of womanhood, young man, and you'll have to handle her carefully or she'll blow away. Make her *happy*, young man! People can't have too much happiness in this world. It's the best thing, after all, to keep them well. Don't be afraid to give her plenty."

"Thank you!" said Gordon fervently, wishing it were in his power to do what the physician ordered.

The kindly physician, the assiduous porter, and the brusque but good-hearted conductor went away at last, and Gordon was left with his precious charge, who, to all appearances, was sleeping quietly. The light was turned low and the curtains of the berth were a little apart. He could see the dim outline of drapery about her, and one shadowy hand lying limp at the edge of the couch, in weary relaxation.

Above her, in the upper berth, which he had told the porter not to make up, lay the great purply-black plumed hat, and a sheaf of lilies-of-the-valley from her bouquet. It seemed so strange for him to be there in their sacred presence.

He locked the door, so that no one should disturb the sleeper, and went slowly into the little private dressing-room. For a full minute after he reached it, he stood looking into the mirror before him, looking at his own weary, soiled face, and wondering if he, Cyril Gordon, heretofore honored and self-respecting, had really done in the last twelve hours all the things which he was crediting himself with having done! And the question was, how had it happened? Had he taken leave of his senses, or had circumstances been too much for him? Had he lost the power of judging between right and wrong? Could he have helped any of the things that had come upon him? How could he have helped them? What ought he to have done? What ought he to do now? Had he spoiled the life of the sweet woman out there in her berth, or could he somehow make amends?

After a minute he rallied, to realize that his face was dirty. He washed the marks of the adhesive plaster away, and then, not satisfied with the result, he brought his shaving things from his suit-case and shaved. Somehow, he felt more like himself after his toilet was completed, and he slipped back into the darkened drawing-room and stretched himself wearily on the couch, which, according to his directions, was not made up, but merely furnished with pillows and a blanket.

The night settled into the noisy quiet of an express train, and each revolution of the wheels, as they whirled their way Chicagoward, resolved itself into the old refrain, "Don't let anything hinder you! Don't let anything hinder you!"

He certainly was not taking the most direct route from New York to Washington, though it might eventually prove that the longest way round was the shortest way home, on account of its comparative safety.

As he settled to the quiet of his couch, a number of things came more clearly to his vision. One was that they had safely passed the outskirts of New York without interference of any kind, and must by this time be speeding toward Albany, unless they were on a road that took them more directly West. He had not thought to look at the tickets for knowledge of his bearings, and the light was too dim for him to make out any monograms or letterings on inlaid wood panels or transoms, even if he had known enough about New York railroads to gain information from them. There was one thing certain: by morning there would surely be some one searching for him. The duped Holman combination would stop at nothing. As for the frantic bridegroom, Gordon dreaded the thought of meeting him. It must be put off at any hazards until the message was safe with his chief; then, if he had to answer with his life for carrying off another man's bride, he could at least feel that he left no duty to his government undone. The obvious thing to do was to get off that train at the first opportunity and get across country to another line of railroad. But how was that to be done with a sick lady on his hands? Of course he could leave her to herself. She probably had taken journeys before, and would know how to get back. She would at least be able to telegraph to her friends to come for her. He could leave her money and a note explaining his involuntary villainy, and her indignation with him would probably be a sufficient stimulant to keep her from dying of chagrin at her plight. But as from the first every nerve and fibre in him rejected this suggestion. He could no more leave her that way than he could run off to save his life and leave that message he carried. He had got into this, and he must get out somehow, but he would not desert the lady or neglect his duty.

Perhaps his brain had been overstrained with the excitement and annoyances of the day, and he was not quite in a condition to judge what was right. He ought to snatch a few minutes' sleep, and then his brain would be clearer.

At last he yielded to the drowsiness that was stealing over him—just for a moment, he thought, and the wheels hummed on their monotonous song: "Don't let anything hinder! Don't let anything—Don't let—! Don't! Hin-der-r-r-r!"

The man slept, and the train rushed on. The night waned. The dawn grew purple in the east, and streaked itself with gold; then later got out a fillet of crimson and drew it over its cloudy forehead. The breath of the lilies filled the little room with delicate fragrance, and mingled strange scenes in the dreams of the man and the woman so strangely united.

The sad little bride grew restless and stirred, but the man on the couch did not hear her.

The morning light grew clearer. The east had put on a vesture of

gold above her purple robe, and its reflection shone softly in at the window.

The sleeper behind the curtains stirred again and became conscious, as in many days past, of her heavy burden of sorrow. Always at first waking the realization of it sat upon her as though it would crush the life from her body. Lying still, with bated breath, she fought back waking consciousness as she had learned to do in the last three months, yet knew it to be futile while she was doing it.

The sun shot up between the bars of crimson, and the piercing, jewelled light lay across the white face, touched the lips with warm fingers, and the troubled soul knew all that had passed.

She lay quiet, letting the torrent sweep over her with its sickening realization. She was married! It was over—with the painful parting from dear ones. She was away from them all. The new life she so dreaded had begun, and how was she to face it—the life with one whom she feared and did not respect? How could she ever have done it but for the love of her dear ones?

Gradually she came to remember the night before—the parting with her mother and her brother; the little things that brought the tears again to her eyes. Then all was blankness. She must have fainted. She did not often faint, but it must be—yes, she remembered opening her eyes and seeing men's faces about her, and George—could it have been George?—with a kinder look in his eyes than she had ever thought to see there. Then she must have fainted again—or had she? No, some one had lifted her into this berth, and she had drunk something and had gone to sleep. What had happened? Where was everybody? It was good to have been left alone. She grudgingly gave her unloved husband a fragment of gratitude for not having tried to talk to her. In the carriage on the way he had seemed determined to begin a long argument of some kind. She did not want to argue any more. She had written tomes upon the subject, and had said all she had to say. He was not deceived. He knew she did not love him, and would never have married him but for her mother's sake and for the sake of her beloved father's memory. What was the use of saying more? Let it rest. The deed was done, and they were married. Now let him have his way and make her suffer as he chose. If he would but let her suffer in silence and not inflict his bitter tongue upon her, she would try to bear it. And perhaps—perhaps she would not live long, and it would soon be all over.

As the daylight grew, the girl felt an inclination to find out whether her husband was near. Cautiously she lifted her head, and, drawing back a corner of the curtain, peered out.

He lay quietly on the couch, one hand under his cheek against the pillow, the other across his breast, as if to guard something. He was

in the deep, still sleep of the overwearied. He seemed scarcely to be breathing.

Celia dropped the curtain, and put her hand to her throat. It startled her to find him so near and so still. Softly, stealthily, she lay down again and closed her eyes. She must not waken him. She would have as long a time to herself as was possible, and try to think of her dear mother and her precious brother. Oh, if she were just going away from them alone, how well she could bear it! But to be going with one whom she had always almost hated——

Her brother's happy words about George suddenly came to her mind. Jefferson had thought him fine. Well, of course the dear boy knew nothing about it. He had not read all those letters—those awful letters. He did not know the threats, the terrible language, that had been used. She shuddered as she thought of it. But in the same breath she was glad that her brother had been deceived. She would not have it otherwise. Her dear ones must never know what she had gone through to save them from disgrace and loss of fortune—disgrace, of course, being the first and greatest. She had feared that George would let them see through his veneer of manners, and leave them troubled; but he had made a better appearance than she had hoped.

Then a sudden desire to look at him again seized her. Now as he lay asleep she might study his face and see what she really had to expect.

She fought the desire to lift the curtain and peer at him again, but finally it gained complete possession of her, and she drew the curtain back and looked once more.

He was lying just as quietly as before. His heavy hair, a little disordered on the pillow, gave him a harmless, interesting appearance. He did not seem at all a fellow of whom to be afraid.

She tried to trace in his features a likeness to the youth of ten years ago, whom she had known when she was but a little girl, and who had tied her braids to her chair, and put oysters and caterpillars down her back, or stretched invisible cords to trip her feet in dark places; who made her visits to a beloved uncle—whom he also had the right to call uncle, though he was no cousin of hers—a long list of catastrophes resulting in tears; who had never failed to mortify her on all occasions possible, and once—— But the memories were too horrible as they crowded one upon another! Let them be forgotten!

She watched the face before her keenly, critically, yet she could see no trace of any such character as she had imagined the boy George must have developed as a man; of which his letters had given her ample proof. This man's face was finely cut and sensitive. There was nothing coarse or selfish in its lines. The long, dark eyelashes lay above dark circles of weariness, and gave that look of tired boyishness that always touches the maternal chord in a woman's heart. George used to have a puffy,

self-indulgent look under his eyes even when he was a boy. She had imagined from his last photograph that he would be much stouter, much more bombastic; but, then, in his sleep, perhaps those things fell from a man.

She tried to turn away indifferently, but something in his face held her. She studied it. If he had been any other man, any stranger, she would have said from looking at him critically that kindness and generosity, self-respect and respect for women, were written all over the face before her. There was fine, firm modelling about the lips and the clean-shaven chin; and about the forehead the look almost of a scholar; yet she thought she knew the man before her to be none of these things. How deceptive were looks! She would probably be envied rather than pitied by all who saw her. Well, perhaps that was better. She could the more easily keep her trouble to herself. But stay, what was there about this man that seemed different? The smooth face? Yes. She had the dim impression that last night he wore a mustache. She must have been mistaken, of course. She had looked at him only when absolutely necessary, and her brain was in such a whirl; but still there seemed to be something different about him.

Her eyes wandered to the hand that lay across his breast. It was the fine white hand of the professional man, the kind of hand that somehow attracts the eye with a sense of cleanness and strength. There was nothing flabby about it. George as a boy used to have big, stumpy fingers and nails chewed down to the quick. She could remember how she used to hate to look at them when she was a little girl, and yet somehow could not keep her eyes away. She saw with relief that the nails on this hand were all well shaped and well cared for.

He looked very handsome and attractive as he lay there. The sun shot one of its first daring bolts of light across his hair as the train turned in its course and lurched northward around a curve. It glinted there for a moment, like a miniature search-light, travelling over the head, showing up every wave and curve. He had the kind of hair which makes a woman's hand instinctively long to touch it.

Celia wondered at the curious thoughts that crowded through her mind, knowing that all the while there was the consciousness that when this man should wake she would think of nothing but his hateful personality as she had known it through the years. And she was his wife! How strange! How terrible!

She lay back again on her pillows, very still, and tried to think; but somehow a pleasant image of him, her husband, lingered in her memory. Could it be possible that she would ever be able to overlook his outrageous conduct toward her, and be even tolerant of him? Sharp memories crowded upon her, and the smarting tears stung their way into her eyes, answering and echoing in her heart, "No, no, a thousand

times, no!" She had paid his price and gained redemption for her own, but—forget what he had done? *Never!*

The long strain of weariness, and the monotony of the onrushing train, lulled her half into unconsciousness again, and the man on the couch slumbered on.

CHAPTER VI.

GORDON came to himself suddenly, with all his senses on the alert, as the noise and motion of the train ceased, and a sudden silence of open country succeeded, broken now and again by distant oncoming and receding voices. He caught the fragment of a sentence from some train official: "It's a half-hour late, and maybe more. We'll just have to lie by, that's all. Here, you, Jim, take this flag and run up to the switch."

Gordon sat up suddenly, his hand yet across his breast, where his first waking thought had been to feel if the little pencil-case were safe.

Glancing stealthily toward the nearly drawn curtains of the berth, and perceiving no motion, he concluded that the girl still slept.

Softly he slipped his feet into his shoes, gave one or two other touches to his toilet, and stood up, looking toward the curtains. He wanted to go out and see where they were stopping, but dared he go without knowing that she was all right?

Softly, reverently, he stooped and brought his eyes close to the opening in the curtains. Celia felt his eyes upon her. Her own were closed, and by a superhuman effort she controlled her breathing, slowly, gently, as if she were asleep.

He looked for a long moment, thrilled by the delicate beauty of her sleeping face, filled with an intoxicating joy to see that her lips were no longer white; then, turning reverently away, he unlocked the door and stepped forth.

The other occupants of the car were still wrapped in slumber. Loud snores of various kinds and qualities testified to that. A dim light at the further end contended luridly, and losingly, with the daylight now flooding the outside world and creeping mischievously into the transoms.

He closed the door of the compartment noiselessly and went down the aisle to the end of the car.

A door was open, and he could hear voices outside. The conductor stood talking with two brakemen.

Gordon looked across the country, and for the first time since he started on his journey let himself remember that it was springtime and May.

There had been a bitter wind the night before, with a hint of rain in the air. In fact, it had rained quite smartly during the ride to the hospital with the hurt child, but he had been so perturbed that he had

taken little notice of the weather. But this was a radiant morning. Every tree-trunk in the distance seemed to stand out clearly, every little grass-blade was set with a glowing jewel, and the winding stream across a narrow valley fairly blazed with brightness. The very road with its deep, clean wheel-grooves seemed like a well-taken photograph.

The air had an alluring softness that made one long to take a walk anywhere out into the world, just for the joy of being and doing. A meadow-lark shot up from somewhere to a telegraph pole, let go a blithe note, and hurried on. It was glorious. The exhilaration filled Gordon's blood.

And here was the chance he craved to slip away from the train before it reached a place where he could be discovered. If he had but thought to bring his suit-case! He could slip back now without being noticed and get it! He could even go without it! But—he could not leave her that way—could he? Ought he? Perhaps he ought— But it would not do to leave his suit-case with her, for it contained letters addressed to his real name. An explanation would of course be demanded, and he could never satisfy a loving mother and brother for having left a helpless girl in such a situation—even if he could satisfy his own conscience, which he knew he never could. He simply could not leave her, and yet he *must* get away from that train as soon as possible. Perhaps this was the only opportunity he would have before reaching Buffalo, and it was very risky, indeed dangerous, to dare enter Buffalo. It was a foregone conclusion that there would be private detectives ready to meet the train in Buffalo, with full descriptions and particulars and only too ready to make way with him if they could do so without being found out by the government. He looked nervously back at the door of the car. Dared he attempt to waken her and say that they had made a mistake and must change cars? Was she well enough? And where could they go?

He looked off toward the landscape for answer to his question.

They were decidedly in the country. The train stood at the top of a high embankment of cinders, below which was a smooth country road running parallel to the railroad for some distance till it met another road at right angles to it, which stretched away between thrifty meadowlands to a nestling village. The glorified stream he had first noticed far up the valley glinted narrower here in the morning light, with a suggestion of watercress and forget-me-nots in its fringes as it veered away under a bridge toward the village and hid itself in a tangle of willows and cat-tails.

How easy it would be to slide down that embankment, and walk out that road over the bridge to the village, where of course a conveyance could be hired to bear him to another railroad town and thence to—Pittsburgh, perhaps, where he could easily get a train to Washington.

How easy if only he were not held by some invisible hands to care for the sweet sleeper inside the car! And yet, for her sake as well as his own, he must do something, and that right speedily.

He was standing thus in deep meditation, looking off at the little village which seemed so near and yet would be so far for her to walk, when he was pervaded with that strange sense of some one near. For an instant he resisted the desire to lift his eyes and prove to himself that no one was present in a doorway which a moment before he knew had been unoccupied. Then, frowning at his own nervousness, he turned.

She stood there in all the beauty of her fresh young girlhood, a delicate pallor on her cheeks, and a deep sadness in her great dark eyes, which were fixed upon him intently, in a sort of puzzled study. She was fully dressed, even to her hat and gloves. Every wave of her golden hair lay exquisitely in place under the purple hat, as though she might have taken an hour or two at her toilet; yet she had made it with excited haste and with trembling fingers, determined to have it accomplished before the return of her dreaded liege lord.

She had sprung from her berth the instant he closed the door upon her, and fastened the little catch to bar him out. Then she had dashed cold water into her face, fastened her garments hurriedly, and tossed the glory of her hair into place with a few touches and what hair-pins she could find on the floor. Then putting on her hat, coat, and gloves, she had followed him into the outer air. She had a feeling that she must have air to breathe or she would suffocate. A wild desire filled her to go alone into the great out-of-doors. Oh, if she but dared to run away from him! But that she might not do, for all his threats would then probably be made good by him upon her dear mother and brother. No, she must be patient and bear to the end all that was set down for her. But she would get out and breathe a little before he returned. He had very likely gone into the smoker. She remembered that the George of old had been an inveterate smoker of cigarettes.

She never thought to come upon him standing thus alone, looking off at the beauty of the morning as if he enjoyed it. The sight of him held her still, watching, as his sleeping face had held her gaze earlier in the morning. How different he was from what she had expected! How the ten years had changed him! One could almost fancy it might have changed his spirit also—but for those letters—those terrible letters! The writer of those letters could not change, except for the worse!

And yet it was most astonishing. He had lost that baggy look under his eyes, and the weak, selfish, cruel pout of lip she remembered so keenly.

Then he turned, and a smile of delight and welcome lit up his handsome face. In spite of herself, she could not keep an answering smile from glimmering faintly in her own.

"What! You up and out here?" he said, hastening closer to the

step. "How are you feeling this morning? Better, I'm sure, or you would not be here so early."

"Oh, I had to get out to the air," she said. "I could n't stand the car another minute. I wish we could walk the rest of the way."

"Do you?" he said, with a quick, surprised appreciation in his voice. "I was just wishing something like that myself. Do you see that beautiful straight road down there? I was longing to slide down this bank and walk over to that little village for breakfast. Then we could get an auto, perhaps, or a carriage, to take us on to another train. If you had n't been so ill last night, I might have proposed it."

"Could we?" she asked earnestly. "I should like it so much," and there was eagerness in her voice. "What a lovely morning!" Her eyes were wistful, like the eyes of those who weep and wonder why they may not laugh, since sunshine is still yellow.

"Of course we could," he said, "if you were only able."

"Oh, I'm able enough. I should much rather do that than to go back into the stuffy car. But would n't they think it awfully queer of us to run away from the train this way?"

"They need n't know anything about it," he declared, like a boy about to play truant. "I'll slip back into the car and get our suit-cases. Is there anything of yours I might be in danger of leaving behind?"

"No, I put everything in my suit-case before I came out," she said listlessly, as though she had already lost her desire to go.

"I'm afraid you are not able," he said, pausing solicitously as he scaled the steps.

She was surprised at his interest in her welfare.

"Why, of course I am," she said insistently. "I have often taken longer walks than that looks to be, and I shall feel much better for being out."

"Good! Then, we'll try it!"

He hurried in for the baggage, and made his way back to her side without meeting any porters or wakeful fellow-passengers. But a distant rumbling greeted his ears. The waited-for express was coming. If they were to get away, it must be done at once or their flight would be discovered, and it certainly was better not to have it known where they got off. He had taken the precaution to close the state-room door behind him, and so it might be some time before their absence would be noted. Perhaps there would be other stops before the train reached Buffalo, in which case their track would not easily be followed.

Celia was already on the ground, looking off toward the little village wistfully. Just how it was to make her lot any brighter to get out of the train and run away to a strange little village, she did not quite explain to herself, but it seemed to be a relief to her pent-up feelings.

Gordon swung himself down on the cinder path, scanning the track

either way. The conductor and brakemen were not in sight. Far in the distance a black speck was rushing down upon them. Gordon could hear the vibration of the rail of the second track, upon which he placed his foot as he helped Celia across. In a moment more the train would pass. It was important that they should be down the embankment, out of sight. Would the delicate girl not be afraid of the steep incline?

She hesitated for just an instant at the top, for it was very steep. Then, looking up at him, she saw that he expected her to go down with him. She gave a little frightened gasp, set her lips, and started.

He held her as well as he could with two suit-cases and an umbrella clutched in his other hand, and finally, as the grade grew steeper, he let go the baggage altogether, and it slid briskly down by itself.

It certainly was not an ideal way of travelling, this new style of "gravity" road, but it landed them without delay, though much shaken and scratched, and divested of every vestige of dignity. It was impossible not to laugh, and Celia's voice rang out merrily, showing that she had not always wept and looked sorrowful.

"Are you much hurt?" asked Gordon anxiously, holding her hands and looking down at her tenderly.

Before she could reply, the express train roared above them, and when it was past they saw their own train take up its interrupted way grumblingly, and rapidly move off. If the passengers on those two trains had not been deeply wrapped in slumber, they might have been surprised to see two stylishly attired young persons, with hats awry and clasped hands, laughing in a country road at five o'clock of a May morning. But they were not awake, and by the time the two in the road below remembered to look up and take notice, the trains were rapidly disappearing.

The girl was deeply impressed with Gordon's solicitude for her. It was so out of keeping with his letters. He had never seemed to care whether she suffered or not. In all the arrangements, he had said what *he* wanted, indeed, what he *would have*, with an implied threat in the framing of his sentence in case she dared demur. Never had there been the least expression of desire for her happiness. Perhaps, after all, he would not prove so terrible as she had feared. And yet those letters! She must harden herself against him. Still, if he would be outwardly decent to her, it would make her lot easier, of course.

"I ought not to have allowed you to slide down there," he declared. "It was terrible, after what you went through last night. I didn't realize how steep and rough it was. I don't see how you ever can forgive me."

"Why, I'm not hurt," she said gently, astonished at his anxiety. "I'm only a little shaken up, and I don't mind it in the least. I think it was rather fun, don't you?"

A faint glimmer of a smile wavered over the corners of her mouth, and Gordon experienced a sudden desire to take her into his arms and kiss her. It was a strange new feeling. He had never had any such thought about Julia Bentley.

"Why, I—why, yes, I guess so, if you're sure you're not hurt."

"Not a bit," she said, and then, for some unexplained reason, they both began to laugh. After that they felt better.

"If your shoes are as full of these miserable cinders as mine are, they need emptying," declared Gordon, shaking first one well shod foot and then the other, and looking ruefully at the little velvet boots of the lady.

"Suppose you sit down"—he looked about for a seat, but the dewy grass was the only resting place visible. He pitched upon the suit-cases and improvised a chair. "Now, sit down and let me take them off for you."

He knelt in the road at her feet as she obeyed, protesting that she could do it for herself. But he overruled her, and began clumsily to unbutton the tiny buttons, holding the timid little foot firmly, almost reverently, against his knee.

He drew the velvet shoe softly off, and, turning it upside down, shook out the intruding cinders, put a clumsy finger in to make sure they were all gone, then shyly, tenderly, passed his hand over the sole of the fine silk-stockinged foot that rested so lightly on his knee, to make sure no cinders clung to it. The sight and touch of that little foot stirred him deeply. He had never before been called upon to render service so intimate to any woman, and he did it now with half-averted gaze and the utmost respect in his manner.

Celia sat watching him, strangely stirred. She could not understand. There must be something more he wanted of her, for George Hayne had never been kind in the past unless he wanted something of her. She dreaded lest she should soon find it out. She drew a deep sigh. If only it were true, and he were good and kind, and had never written those awful letters! How good and dear it would be to be tenderly cared for this way! Her lips drooped at the corners, and her eyelids drooped in company with the sigh; then Gordon looked up in great distress.

"You are tired!" he declared, pausing in his attempt to fasten the little pearl buttons. "I have been cruel to let you get off the train!"

"Indeed I'm not," said the girl, brightening with sudden effort. "You never can button those shoes with your fingers," she laughed, as he redoubled his efforts to capture a tiny disc of pearl and set it into its small velvet socket. "Here! I have a button-hook in my hand-bag. Try this."

She produced a small silver instrument from a gold-link bag on her

arm and handed it to him. He took it helplessly, trying first one end and then the other, and succeeding with neither.

"Here, let me show you," she laughed, pulling off one glove. Her white fingers grasped the silver buttonhook, and flashed in and out of the velvet holes, knitting the little shoe to the foot in no time. He watched the process in humble wonder, and she would not have been a human girl not to have been flattered with his interest and admiration. For the minute she forgot who and what he was, and let her laugh ring out merrily; and so with shy audacity he essayed to take off the other shoe.

They really felt quite well acquainted and as if they were starting on a day's picnic, when they finally gathered up their belongings and started down the road. Gordon summoned all his ready wit and intellect to brighten the walk for her, though he found himself again and again on the brink of referring to his Washington life, or some other personal matter that would have brought a wondering question to her lips. He had decided that he must not tell her who he was until he could put her in an independent position, where she could get away from him at once if she chose. He was bound to look after her until he could place her in good hands, or at least where she could look after herself, and it was better to carry it out leaving her to think what she pleased until he could tell her everything. If all went well, they might be able to catch a Pittsburgh train that night and be in Washington the next day. Then, his message delivered, he would tell her the whole story. Until then he must hold his peace.

They went gaily down the road, the girl's pale cheeks beginning to flush with the morning air and the exercise. She was not naturally delicate, and her faint the night before had been the result of a series of heavy strains on a heart burdened with terrible fear. The morning and his kindness had made her forget for the time that she was supposed to be walking into a world of dread and sacrifice.

"The year's at the spring,
The day's at the morn,"

quoted Gordon gaily,

"Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled——"

He waved an umbrella off to where a hill flashed back a thousand lights from its jewelled grass-blades thickly set.

"The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn,"

went on Celia, suddenly catching his spirit, and pointing to a lark that darted up into the blue with a trill of the morning in his throat.

Gordon turned appreciative eyes upon her. It was good to have her take up his favorite poet in that tone of voice—a tone that showed she too knew and loved Browning.

"God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world,"

finished Gordon in a quieter voice, looking straight into her eyes. "That seems very true to-day, does n't it?"

The blue eyes wavered with a hint of shadow in them as they looked back into the brown ones.

"Almost—perhaps," she faltered wistfully.

The young man wished he dared go behind that "almost—perhaps" and find out what she meant, but concluded it was better to bring back the smile and help her to forget for a little while, at least.

Down by the brook they paused to rest, under a weeping willow, whose green-tinged plumes were dabbling in the brook. Gordon arranged the suit-cases for her to sit upon, then climbed down to the brook-side and gathered a great bunch of forget-me-nots, blue as her eyes, and brought them to her.

She looked at them in wonder, to think they grew out here, wild, untended. She had never seen them before, except in pots in the florist's windows. She touched them delicately with the tips of her fingers, as if they were too ethereal for earth; then fastened them in the breast of her gown.

"They exactly match your eyes!" he exclaimed involuntarily, and then wished he had not spoken, for she flushed and paled under his glance, until he felt he had been unduly bold. He wondered why he had said that. He never had been in the habit of saying pretty things to girls, but this girl somehow called it from him unbidden.

Her heart had thrilled strangely as he spoke, and she was vexed with herself that it should be so. A man who had bullied and threatened her for three terrible months and forced her to marry him had no right to a thrill of her heart nor a look from her eyes, be he ever so kind for the moment. He certainly was nice and pleasant when he chose to be; she must watch herself, for never, never, must she yield weakly to his smooth overtures. Well did she know him. He had some reason for all this pleasantness. It would surely be revealed soon.

She stiffened her lips and tried to look away from him to the purply-green hills; but the echo of his words came upon her again, and again her heart thrilled at them. What if—oh, what if he were all right? The sweet color came into her cheeks again, and the tears flew quickly to her eyes, till they looked all sky and dew, and she dared not turn back to him.

The silence remained unbroken until a lark in the willow copse

behind them burst forth into song and broke the spell that was upon them.

"Are you offended at what I said?" he asked earnestly. "I am sorry if you did not like it. The words said themselves without my stopping to think whether you might not like it. Will you forgive me?"

"Oh," she said, lifting her forget-me-not eyes to his, "I am not offended. There is nothing to forgive. It was—beautiful!"

Then his eyes spoke the compliment over again, and the thrill started anew in her heart, till her cheeks grew quite rosy, and she buried her face in the coolness of the tiny flowers to hide her confusion.

"It was very true," he said in a low, lover-like voice.

"Ought n't we to hurry on to catch our train?" said Celia, suddenly springing to her feet. "I'm quite rested now." She felt if she stayed there another moment she would yield to the spell he had cast upon her.

The man got to his feet and reminded himself that this was another man's promised wife to whom he had been letting his soul go out.

"Don't let anything hinder you! Don't let anything hinder you!" suddenly babbled out the little brook, and he gathered up his suit-cases and started on.

"I am going to carry my suit-case," declared a very decided voice behind him, and a small hand seized hold of its handle.

"I beg your pardon, you are not!" declared Gordon.

"But they are too heavy for you—both of them—and the umbrella too," she protested. "Give me the umbrella, then."

But he would not give her even the umbrella, rejoicing in his strength to shield her and bear her burdens. As she walked beside him, she remembered vividly a morning when George Hayne had made her carry two heavy baskets, that his hands might be free to shoot birds. Could this be the same George Hayne?

Altogether, it was a happy walk, and far shorter than either had expected. Gordon kept begging his companion to sit down and rest again, but she would not. She was quite eager and excited about the strange village to which they were coming. Its outlying farm-houses were all so clean and white, with green blinds folded placidly over their front windows, and only their back doors astir. The cows all looked peaceful, and the dogs all seemed friendly.

They walked up the village street, shaded in patches with flecks of sunshine through the young leaves.

One long, straight, maple-lined street, running parallel to the stream, comprised the village. The early village loungers looked at them disinterestedly.

"Hed a runaway?" asked one.

"Oh, no!" laughed Gordon. "We did n't travel with horses."

"Hed a puncture, then," announced the village wiseacre, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Wal, you come the wrong direction to git help," said another languid listener. "Thur ain't no garridge here. You'd ought to 'a' turned back to Ashville. They got a good blacksmith there can tinker ye up."

"Is that so?" said Gordon interestedly. "What's the next town on ahead and how far?"

"Sugar Grove's two mile further on, and Milton's five. They've got a garridge and a restaurant to Milton, but that's only sence the railroad built a junction there."

"Has any one here a conveyance I could hire to take us to Milton?" questioned Gordon.

A boy was found who reluctantly owned that he had a "rig" which for a consideration was at their service, and they prevailed upon a little old lady in a tiny white house to prepare for them a most delicious breakfast of poached eggs, coffee, home-made bread, butter like roses, and a comb of amber honey. To each the experience was a new one, and they enjoyed it together like two children, letting their eyes speak volumes of comments in the midst of the old lady's volubility.

The "rig" proved to be a high spring-wagon with two seats. In the front one the youth lounged, without a thought of assisting his passengers. Gordon swung the baggage up, and then lifted the girl into the back seat, himself taking the place beside her, and planting a firm hand and arm behind the backless seat, that she might feel more secure.

That ride, with his arm behind her, was just one more link in the pretty chain of sympathy that was being welded about these two. Unconsciously she more and more began to droop, until when she grew very tired he seemed to know at once.

"Just lean against my arm," he said. "You must be very tired, and it will help you bear the jolting." He spoke as if his arm were made of wood and iron, and was merely one of his belongings, like an umbrella or suit-case. He made it seem quite the natural thing for her to lean against him. If he had claimed it as her right and privilege as wife, she would have recoiled from him for recalling to her the hated relation, and would have sat straight as a bean-pole the rest of the way; but, as it was, she sank back a trifle deprecatingly, and realized that it was a great help.

Yet the strong arm almost trembled as he felt the precious weight against it, and he wished that the way were ten miles instead of five. Once, as Celia leaned forward to point to a particularly lovely bit of view that opened up as they wound around a curve in the road, they ran over a stone, and the wagon gave an unexpected jolt. Gordon reached his hand out to steady her, and she settled back to his arm with a sense

of safety and being cared for that was very pleasant. Looking up shyly, she saw his eyes upon her, with that deep look of admiration and something more, and again that strange thrill of joy that had come when he gave her the forget-me-nots swept through her. She felt as if she were harboring a sinful thought when she remembered the letters he had written; but the joy of the day, and the sweetness of happiness for even a moment, when she had been for so long a time sad, were so pleasant that she let herself enjoy them and drift, refusing to think evil of him now, here, in this bright day. Thus like children on a picnic they passed through Sugar Grove and came to the town of Milton.

CHAPTER VII.

INVESTIGATION disclosed the fact that there was a train for Pittsburgh about three in the afternoon. Gordon sent a code telegram to his chief, assuring him of the safety of the message, and of his own intention to proceed to Washington as fast as steam could carry him. Then he took the girl to a restaurant, where they mounted high stools, and partook with an unusually ravenous appetite of nearly everything on the menu—corn soup, roast beef, baked trout, stewed tomatoes, cold slaw, custard, apple, and mince pies, with a cup of good country coffee and real cream—all for twenty-five cents apiece.

It was a very merry meal. Celia felt somehow as if for the time all memory of the past had been taken from her, and she were somehow free to think and act happily in the present, without any great problems to solve or decisions to make.

After their dinner, they took a short walk to a tiny park, where two white ducks disported themselves on a seven-by-nine pond, spanned by a rustic bridge where lovers had cut their initials. Gordon took out his knife and idly cut C. H. in the rough bark of the upper rail, while his companion sat on the little board seat and watched him. She was pondering the fact that he had cut her initials, and not his own. It would have been like the George of old to cut his own and never once think of hers. And he had put but one H. Probably he thought of her now as Celia Hayne.

Those letters! How they haunted her and clouded every bright experience that she fain would have grasped and held for a little hour.

They were silent now, while he worked and she thought. He had finished the C. H., and was cutting another C, but instead of making another H, he carefully carved out the letter G. What was that for? C. G.? Who was C. G.? Oh, how stupid! George, of course. He had started a C by mistake. But he did not add the expected H. Instead, he snapped his knife shut, laid his hand over the carving, and leaned over the rail.

"Some time, perhaps, we'll come here again, and remember," he said, and then bethought him that he had no right to hope for any such anniversary.

"Oh!" She looked up into his eyes, startled, troubled, the haunting of her fears in the shadows of the blue.

He looked down into them and read her trouble, read and understood, and looked back his great desire to comfort her.

His look carried further than he meant it should. For the third time that day a great thrill of wonder and delight passed over her and left her fearful with a strange joy that she felt she should put from her.

It was only an instant, that look, but it brought the bright color to both faces, and made Gordon feel the immediate necessity of changing the subject.

"See those little fishes down there?" he said, pointing to the tiny lake below them.

Through a blur of tears, the girl looked down and saw the tiny, sharp-finned creatures darting here and there in a beam of sun like a small search-light set to show them off.

She moved her hand on the rail to lean further over, and her soft fingers touched his hand for a moment. She would not draw them away quickly, lest she hurt him; why, she did not know, but she could not—would not—hurt him. Not now! The two hands lay side by side for a full minute, and the touch to Gordon was as if a roseleaf had kissed his soul. He had never felt anything sweeter. He longed to gather the little hand into his clasp and feel its pulses trembling there as he had felt it in the church the night before, but she was not his. He might not touch her till she had her choice of what to do, and she would never choose him, never, when she knew how he had deceived her.

That one supreme moment they had of perfect consciousness, consciousness of the drawing of soul to soul, of the sweetness of that hovering touch of hands, of the longing to know and understand each other.

Then a sharp whistle sounded down the road, and a farmer's boy with a new rake and a sack of corn on his shoulder came sauntering briskly down the road to the bridge. Instantly they drew apart, and Celia felt that she had been on the verge of disloyalty to her true self.

They walked silently back to the station, each conscious of something that separated. Gordon struggled to prevent it, but he seemed helpless. Celia would smile in answer to his quiet remarks, but it was a smile of distance, such as she had worn early in the morning. She had quite found her former standing ground, with its fence of prejudice, and she was repairing the breaks through which she had gone over to the enemy during the day. She was bracing herself with dire reminders, and snatches from those terrible letters which were written in characters of fire in her heart. She had forgotten about those terrible things he

had said of her dear dead father. How could she have forgotten for an instant! How could she have let her hand lie close to the hand that had defiled itself by writing such things!

By the time they were seated in the train, she was freezing in her attitude, and poor Gordon sat miserably beside her and tried to think what he had done to offend her. It was not his fault that her hand had lain near his on the rail. She had put it there herself. Perhaps she expected him to put his over it, to show her that he cared as a bridegroom should care—as he did care, in reality, if he only had the right.

Much to Gordon's relief, the train carried a parlor-car, and it happened on this particular day to be almost deserted. He established his companion comfortably, disposed of the baggage, and sat down, but the girl paid no heed to him. With a sad, set face, she stared out of the window, her eyes seeming to see nothing. For two hours she sat so, he making remarks occasionally, to which she made little or no reply, until he lapsed into silence, looking at her with troubled eyes. Finally, just as they neared the outskirts of Pittsburgh, he leaned softly forward and touched her coat-sleeve, to attract her attention.

"Have I offended—hurt—you in any way?" he asked gently.

She turned toward him, and her eyes were brimming full of tears.

"No," she said, and her lips were trembling. "No, you have been—most kind—but—but I cannot forget *those letters!*" She ended with a sob and put up her handkerchief quickly to stifle it.

"Letters?" he asked helplessly. "What letters?"

"The letters you wrote me. All the letters of the last five months. I cannot forget them. I can *never* forget them!"

He looked at her anxiously, not knowing what to say, and yet he must say something. The time had come when some kind of an understanding must take place.

But letters! He had written no letters. His face lighted up with the swift certainty of one thing about which he had not dared to be sure: she still thought him the man she had intended to marry. It was a great relief to be sure of so much. But something must be said.

"Letters!" he repeated again stupidly, and then added with perplexed tone: "Would you mind telling me just what it was in the letters that hurt you?"

She turned eyes of astonishment on him.

"How can you ask?" she said almost bitterly. "You surely must know how terrible they were to me! You could not be the man you have seemed to be to-day if you did not know what you were doing to me in making all those terrible threats. You must know how cruel they were."

"I am afraid I don't understand," he said earnestly. "Would you mind telling me exactly what you think I wrote you that sounded like a threat?"

He asked the question half hesitatingly, because he was not quite sure whether he was justified in thus obtaining private information under false pretenses, and yet he felt that he must know just what troubled her or he could never help her; and he was sure that if she knew he was an utter stranger, even a kindly one, those gentle lips would never open to inform him upon her torturer.

"How can you ask such a question, since it has been the constant subject of discussion in all our letters?" she replied, sitting up with asperity.

"I do ask it," he said quietly, "and, believe me, I have a good motive in doing so."

She looked at him in surprise. It was impossible to be angry with those kindly eyes, even though he did persist in a wilful stupidity.

"Well, then, since you wish it stated once more, I will tell you," she declared, the tears welling again into her eyes. "You first demanded that I marry you—demanded with a hidden threat that if I did not, you would bring some dire calamity upon me. When I refused you, you told me that you could not only take away from my mother all the property which she had inherited from her brother, by means of a will made just before my uncle's death, and unknown except to his lawyer and you; but that you could and would blacken my dear dead father's name and honor, and show that every cent that belonged to Mother and Jefferson and myself was stolen property. When I challenged you to prove any such thing against my honored father, you went still further and threatened to bring out a terrible story and prove it with witnesses who would swear to anything you said. You knew my father's white life, you as much as owned your charges were false, and yet you dared to send me a letter from a vile creature who pretended that she was his first wife, and who said she could prove that he had spent much of his time in her company. You knew the whole thing was a falsehood, but you dared to threaten to make this known through the newspapers if I did not marry you. You realized that I knew that, even though few people and no friends would believe such a thing of my father, such a report in the papers—false though it was—would crush my mother to death. You knew that I would give my life to save her, and so you had me in your power, so you have me now. You have always wanted me in your power, just because you love to torture, and now you have me. But you cannot make me forget what you have done."

She dropped her face into the little wet handkerchief, and Gordon sat with white, drawn countenance and clenched hands. He was fairly trembling with indignation toward the villain who had thus dared to impose upon this delicate flower of womanhood. He longed to search the world over for the false bridegroom; and, finding, give him his just dues.

"It is terrible, *terrible*, what you have told me," he said. "To have written such things to one like you—in fact, to any one on earth—seems to me unforgivable. It is the most inhuman cruelty I have ever heard of. You are fully justified in hating and despising the man who wrote such words to you."

"Then why did you write them?" she burst forth. "And how can you sit there calmly and talk that way about it, as if you had nothing to do with the matter?"

"Because I never wrote those letters," he said, looking her steadily, earnestly, in the eyes.

"You never wrote them!" she exclaimed. "You dare to deny it?"

"I dare to deny it." His voice was quiet, earnest, convincing.

She looked at him, dazed, bewildered, indignant, sorrowful. "But you cannot deny it," she said, her fragile frame trembling with excitement. "I have the letters all in my suit-case. You cannot deny your own handwriting. I have the last awful one—the one in which you threatened Father's good name—here in my hand-bag. I felt as if I must always keep it with me, lest otherwise its awful secret would somehow get out. Read it and see your own name signed to the words you say you did not write!"

While she talked, her trembling fingers had taken a folded, crumpled letter from her little hand-bag, and this she reached over and laid upon the arm of his chair.

"Read it," she said. "Read it and see that you cannot deny it."

"I should rather not read it," he said. "I do not need to read it to deny."

"But I insist that you read it," said the girl.

"If you insist, I will read it," he said, taking the letter reluctantly and opening it.

She sat watching him furtively while he read.

Then his brown eyes looked up and met her tearful gaze steadily, a fine anger burning in them.

"The letter is vile," he said, "and the man who wrote it is a black-guard, and deserves the utmost that the law allows for such offenses. With your permission, I shall make it my business to see that he gets it."

"What do you mean?" she said, wide-eyed. "How could you punish yourself? You cannot still deny that you wrote the letters."

"I still deny that I wrote it, or ever saw it until you handed it to me just now."

The girl looked at him, nonplussed, more than half convinced, in spite of reason.

"But is n't that your handwriting?"

"It is not. Look!"

He took out his fountain pen, and, holding the letter on the arm of her chair, he wrote rapidly in his natural hand her own name and address beneath the address on the envelope, then held it up to her.

"Do they look alike?"

The two writings were as utterly unlike as possible, the letter being addressed in an almost unreadable scrawl, and the fresh writing standing fine and clear, in a script that spoke of character and business ability. Even a child could see at a glance that the two were not written by the same hand.

She looked from the envelope to his eyes and back again to the letter, startled, not knowing what to think.

But before either of them had time for another word the conductor, the porter, and several people from the car behind came hurriedly through, and they realized that while they talked the train had come to a halt in a great city station.

"Why," said Gordon, startled, "we must have reached Pittsburgh."

He hurriedly gathered up the baggage, and they went out of the car. There was no opportunity to say anything more as they mingled with the crowd.

Gordon looked down at the white, drawn face of the girl, and his heart was touched with compassion for her trouble. He stooped and whispered tenderly:

"Don't worry, little girl! Just try to trust me, and I will explain it all."

"Can you explain it?" she asked anxiously, as if catching at a rope thrown out to save her life.

"Perfectly," he said, "if you will be patient and trust me. But we cannot talk here. Just wait in this seat until I see if I can get the state-room on the sleeper."

He left her with his courteous bow, and she sat watching his tall, fine figure as he threaded his way among the crowds to the Pullman window. In spite of her reason, a tiny bit of hope was springing up in her heart for the future, and without her own will she found herself inclined to trust him.

There was some kind of an excursion on, and the place was crowded. The train-men kept calling off specials, and crowds hurried out of the waiting-room, only to be replaced by other crowds.

Gordon had a long wait before he finally secured the coveted state-room and started back to her, when suddenly a face that he knew loomed up in the crowd and startled him. It was the face of a private detective who was well known about Washington, but whose headquarters were in New York.

Until that instant, it had not occurred to Gordon to fear watchers so far south and west as Pittsburgh. It was not possible that the other bride-

groom would think to track him here, and, as for the Holman contingent, they would not be likely to make a public disturbance about his disappearance, lest they be found to have some connection with the first theft of government property. They could have watchers only through private means, and they must have been wily indeed if they had anticipated his move through Pittsburgh to Washington. Still, it was the natural move for him to make in order to get home as quickly as possible and yet escape them. And this man in the crowd was the very one whom they would have been likely to pick out for their work. He was as slippery in his dealings as they must be, and no doubt was in league with them. Gordon knew the man and his ways thoroughly, and had no mind to fall into his hands.

Whether he had been seen by the detective yet or not, he could not tell, but he suspected he had, by the way the man stood around and avoided recognizing him. There was not an instant to be lost. The fine state-room must go untenanted. He must make a dash for liberty. Liberty! Ah, East Liberty! What queer things these brains of ours are! He knew Pittsburgh just a little. He remembered having caught a train at East Liberty Station once when he had not time to come down to this station to take it. Perhaps he might get the same train at East Liberty. It was nearly two hours before it left.

Swooping down upon the baggage, he murmured in the girl's ear:

"Can you hurry a little? We must catch a car right away."

She followed him closely through the crowd, and in a moment they were out in the lighted blackness of the streets. One glance backward showed his supposed enemy stretching his neck above the crowd, as if searching for some one, as he walked hurriedly toward the very doorway they had just passed.

They boarded the first car that came along, but a quick consultation with the conductor showed that it did not go to East Liberty. They were obliged to make two changes, but always the cars were crowded, and they could not get a seat together.

When they reached East Liberty Station, a long train was just coming in, all sleepers, and they could hear the echo of a stentorian voice: "Special for Harrisburg, Baltimore, and Washington! All aboard!"

Without taking time for thought, Gordon hurried Celia forward, and they sprang breathlessly aboard. Not till they were fairly in the cars and the wheels moving under them did it occur to Gordon that his companion had had nothing to eat since about twelve o'clock. She must be famished, and in a fair way to be ill again. What a fool he was not to have thought! They could have stopped in some obscure restaurant along the way as well as not, and taken a later train, and yet it was safer to get away at once. There might be watchers here at

East Liberty, too, and he was lucky to have got on the train without a challenge. Perhaps there was a buffet attached. At least, he would investigate. If there was n't, they must get off at the next stop.

Gordon went at once to the conductor, and showed his state-room tickets, inquiring if they could be used on this train.

"No," growled the worried conductor. "You're on the wrong train. This is a special, and every berth in the train is taken now but one upper."

"Then, we'll have to get off at the next stop, I suppose, and take the other train," said Gordon dismally.

"There is n't any other stop till somewhere in the middle of the night. I tell you this is a special, and we're scheduled to go straight through. East Liberty's the last stop."

"But I have a lady with me who is n't at all well," said Gordon, with dignity.

"So much the worse for the lady," replied the conductor inhumanly. "There's one upper berth, I told you."

"An upper berth would n't do for her," said Gordon decidedly. "She is n't well, I tell you."

"Suit yourself!" snapped the harassed official. "I reckon it's better than nothing. You may not have it long. I'm likely to be asked for it the next half-minute."

"Is that so? And is there absolutely nothing else?"

"Young man, I can't waste words on you. I have n't time. Take it or let it alone. It's all one to me. There's some standing room left in the day-coach, perhaps."

"I'll take it," said Gordon meekly, wishing he could go back and undo the last half-hour. How in the world was he to go and tell the girl that he could provide her nothing better than an upper berth?

She was sitting with her back to him, her face resting wearily on her hand against the window. Two men with largely checked suits, big seal rings, and diamond scarf-pins sat in the opposite seat. He knew it was most unpleasant for her. A nondescript woman with a very large hat and with thick powder on her face shared Celia's seat. He reflected that "specials" did not always bear a select company.

"Is there nothing you can do?" he pleaded with the conductor, as he took the bit of pasteboard entitling him to the last vacant berth. "Don't you suppose you could get some man to change and give her a lower? It'll be very hard for her. She is n't used to upper berths."

His eyes rested wistfully on the bowed head. Celia had taken off her plumed hat, and the fitful light of the car played with the gold of her hair. The conductor's grim eye softened as he looked.

"That the lady? I'll see what I can do," he said briefly, and stumped off to the next car.

Gordon went over to Celia and told her in a low tone that he hoped to have arrangements made for her soon, so that she could be comfortable. He added that he had made a great blunder in getting on this train, and now there was no chance to get off for several hours, perhaps, and probably no supper to be had.

"Oh, it does n't matter in the least," said Celia listlessly. "I'm not at all hungry."

Gordon started off to search for something to eat for her, and was more successful than he had dared hope. The newsboy had two chicken sandwiches left, and these, with the addition of a fine orange, a box of chocolates, and a glass of ice-water, he presently brought to her, and was rewarded by a smile.

But he could not sit beside her, for the places were all taken. There seemed to be a congested state of things in the whole train, every seat being taken and men standing in the aisles. He noticed now that they all wore badges of some fraternal order. It was doubtless a delegation to some great convention. They were a good-natured, noisy, happy crowd, but not anywhere among them was to be found a quiet spot where he and Celia could go on with their suddenly interrupted conversation. Presently the conductor came to him and said he had found a gentleman who would give the lady his lower berth and take her upper one. It was already made up, and the lady might take possession at once.

Gordon made the exchange of tickets, and went at once to escort Celia to her berth, hoping that in the other car there would be some spot where they could talk for a few minutes. But he was disappointed. It was even fuller than the first car. He arranged everything for her comfort, disposed of her hat and fixed her suit-case so that she could open it, but even while he was doing it there were people crowding by and no private conversation could be had.

"Try to trust me until morning," he whispered. "I'll explain it all to you then. I had nothing to do with those letters. Forget it, and try to rest. Will you?"

His tone was wistful. He had never wanted to do anything so much in all his life as to stoop and kiss those sweet lips, and the lovely eyes that looked up at him out of the dusky shadows of the berth, filled with fear and longing. But he held himself with a firm hand. She was not his to kiss. When she knew how he had deceived her, she would probably never give him the right to kiss her.

"I will try," she murmured in answer to his question, and then added: "But where will you be? Is your berth near by?"

"Not far away—I had to take a place in another car."

"Oh!" she said, a little anxiously. "Are you sure you have a good, comfortable place?"

"Oh, yes, I shall be all right," he answered joyously. It was so wonderful to have her care whether he was comfortable or not.

The porter was making up the opposite berth, and there was no room to stand longer, so he bade her good-night, she putting out her little hand for a farewell. For an instant he held it close, with gentle pressure, as if to reassure her, then he went away to the day-coach, and settled down into a hard corner at the very back of the car, drawing his travelling cap over his eyes, and letting his heart beat out wild joy over that little touch of her dear hand. Wave after wave of sweetness went over him, thrilling his very soul with a joy he had never known before.

And this was love! And what kind of a wretch was he, presuming to love like this—a woman who was the promised bride of another man! Ah, but such a man! A villain! A brute, who had used his power over her to make her suffer tortures!

Then the memory of the look in her eyes, the turn of her head, the soft touch of her fingers as they lay for that instant in his, the inflection of her voice, would send that wave of sweetness over his senses, his heart would thrill anew, and he would forget the wretch who stood between him and this lovely girl whom he knew now he loved as he had never dreamed a man could love.

Gradually his mind began to steady itself under the sweet intoxication, and he began to wonder just what he should say to her in the morning. It was a good thing he had not had further opportunity to talk with her that night, for he could not have told her all; and now if all went well they would be in Washington in the morning, and he might make some excuse till after he had delivered his message. Then he would be free to tell the whole story, and lay his case before her for decision. His heart throbbed with ecstasy as he thought of the possibility of her forgiving him, and yet it seemed most unlikely. Sometimes he would let his wild longings fancy for just an instant what joy it would be if she could be induced to let the marriage stand. But at the same time he told himself that could never be. She would never trust a man who had even unwittingly allowed her to be bound by the sacred tie of marriage to an utter stranger.

And thus, amid hope and fear, the night whirled itself away. Forward in the sleeper, the girl lay wide awake for a long time. In the middle of the night a thought evolved itself out of the blackness of her curtained couch. She sat upright alertly and stared into the darkness. The thought was born out of a dreamy vision of the crisp brown waves that covered the head of the man who had lain sleeping outside her curtains in the early morning. It came to her with sudden force that not so had been the hair of the boy George Hayne, who used to trouble her girlish days. His was thin and black and oily, collecting naturally

into little isolated strings with the least warmth, and giving him the appearance of a kitten who had been out in the rain. One lock on the very crown of his head had always refused to lie down, no matter how much persuasion was brought to bear upon it. It had been the one point on which the self-satisfied George had been pregnable, his hair, that scalp-lock that would always arise stiffly, oilily, from the top of his head. The hair she had looked at admiringly that morning in the dawning crimson of the rising sun had not been that way. It had curved clingingly to the shape of the fine head, as if it loved to go that way. It was beautiful and fine and burnished, with a sense of life and vigor in its every wave. Could hair change in ten years?

The girl could not solve the problem, but the thought was most startling. And at last she lay down and slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY were late coming into Washington, for the special had been side-tracked in the night for several express trains, and the noisy crowd who had kept one another awake till after midnight made up by sleeping far into the morning.

Three times did Gordon make the journey three cars front to see if his companion of yesterday were awake and needed anything, but each time found the curtains drawn and still, and each time he went slowly back again to his seat in the crowded day-coach.

It was not until the white dome of the capitol, and the tall needle of the monument, were painted soft and vision-like against the sky, that he sought her again, and found her fully ready, standing in the aisle while the porter put up the berth out of the way. Beneath the great brim of her purple hat, where the soft fronds of her plumes trembled with the motion of the train, she lifted sweet eyes to him, as if she were both glad and frightened to see him. And then that ecstasy shot through him again, as he realized suddenly what it would be to have her for his life-companion.

They could only smile at each other for good-morning, for everybody was standing up and being brushed, and pushing here and there for suit-cases and lost umbrellas.

What little things sometimes change a lifetime, and make for our safety or our destruction! That very morning three keen watchers were set to guard that station at Washington to hunt out the government spy who had stolen back the stolen message, and take him, message and all, dead or alive, back to New York; for the man who could testify against the Holman combination was not to be let live if there was such a thing as getting him out of the way. But they never thought to watch the special which was supposed to carry only delegates to the

great convention. He could not possibly be on that! They knew he was coming from Pittsburgh, probably, for they had been so advised by telegram the evening before by one of their company who had seen him buying a sleeper ticket for Washington, but they felt safe about that special, for they had made inquiries and been told no one but delegates could possibly come on it. They had done their work thoroughly, and were on hand with every possible plan perfected for bagging their game, but they took the time when the Pittsburgh special was expected to arrive for eating a hearty breakfast in the restaurant across the street from the station. Two of them emerged from the restaurant doorway in plenty of time to meet the next Pittsburgh train, just as Gordon, having placed the lady in a closed carriage, was getting in himself.

If the carriage had stood in any other spot along the pavement in front of the station, they never would have seen him, but, as it was, they had a full view of him; and because they were Washington men, and experts in their line, they recognized him at once, and knew their plans had failed, and that only by extreme measures could they hope to prevent the delivery of the message which would mean downfall and disaster to them and their schemes.

As Gordon slammed shut the door of the carriage, he caught a vision of his two enemies pointing excitedly toward him, and he knew that the bloodhounds were on the scent.

His heart beat wildly. His anxiety was divided between the message and the lady. What should he do?

"Don't let anything hinder you! Don't let anything hinder you! Make it a matter of life and death!" rang the little ditty in his ears, and now it seemed as if he must go straight ahead with the message. And yet—"a matter of life and death"! He could not, must not, take the lady with him into danger.

He had already told the driver to take them to his apartments as rapidly as possible. It would not do to stop him now and change the directions, for a pistol-shot could easily reach him yet, and, coming from a crowd, who would be suspected? His enemies were standing on the threshold of a place where there were many of their kind to protect them.

Celia was looking out with interest at the streets, and did not notice Gordon's white, set face and burning eyes, as he strained his vision to note how fast the horse was going.

It seemed an age to him before they stopped at his apartments. To Celia, it had been but a short ride, in which familiar scenes had brought her pleasure.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" she smiled to Gordon. "It is Washington, dear old Washington."

Somehow he controlled the tumult in his heart and smiled back, saying in a voice quite natural:

"I am so glad you like it."

She seemed to understand that they could not talk until they reached a quiet place somewhere, and she did not trouble him with questions. As the carriage stopped, he spoke with low, hurried voice:

"We get out here."

He had the fare ready for the driver, and, stepping out, hurried Celia into the shelter of the hallway. In a minute more the elevator landed them safe in the hall before his own apartment.

Taking a latch-key from his pocket, he applied it to the door, flung it open, and ushered Celia to a large leather chair in the middle of the room. Then, stepping quickly to the side of the room, he touched a bell, and from it went to the telephone, with an "Excuse me, please, this is necessary," to the girl, who sat astonished, wondering at the homelikeness of the room and at the "at-homeness" of the man.

"Give me 254 L, please," he said. . . . "Is this 254 L? Is Mr. Osborne in? . . . You say he has *not* gone to the office? . . . May I speak with him? . . . Is this Mr. Osborne? . . . I did not expect you to know my voice. . . . Yes, sir; just arrived, and all safe so far. Shall I bring it to the house or the office? . . . The house? . . . All right, sir. Immediately. . . . By the way, I am sure Hale and Burke are on my track. They saw me at the station. . . . To your house? . . . You will wait until I come? . . . All right, sir. . . . Yes, immediately. . . . Sure, I'll take precaution. . . . Good-by."

With the closing words came a tap at the door.

"Come, Henry," he answered, as the astonished girl turned toward the door. "Henry, you will go down, please, to the restaurant, and bring up a menu card. This lady will select what she would like to have, and you will serve breakfast for her in this room as soon as possible. I shall be out for perhaps an hour, and, meantime, you will obey any orders she may give you."

He did not introduce her as his wife, but she did not notice the omission. She had suddenly become aware of a strange, distraught haste in his manner, and when he said he was going out alarm seized her, she could not tell why.

The man bowed deferentially to his master, looked his admiration and devotion to the lady, and disappeared to obey orders.

Celia turned toward Gordon for an explanation, but he was already at the telephone again:

"Forty-six! . . . Is this the garage? . . . This is the Harris Apartments. . . . Can you send Thomas with a closed car to the rear door immediately? . . . Yes. . . . No, I want Thomas,

and a car that can speed. . . . Yes, the rear door, *rear*, and at once. . . . What? . . . What's that? . . . But I *must*. . . . It's *official* business. . . . Well, I thought so. Hurry them up. Good-by."

He turned and saw her troubled gaze following him with growing fear in her eyes.

Just one moment he paused, and, coming toward her, laid his hands on hers tenderly.

"I'm sorry to have to go from you for a little while, but it is necessary. I cannot explain to you until I have been. You will trust me? You will not worry?"

"I will try!"

Her lips were quivering, and her eyes were filled with tears. Again he felt that intense longing to lay his lips upon hers and comfort her, but he put it from him.

"There is nothing to feel sad about," he said, smiling gently. "Only, there is need for haste, for if I wait, I may fail yet——"

"Go!" she said, putting out her hands in a gesture of resignation, as if she would hurry him from her.

Then his control almost went from him. He nearly took those hands in his and kissed them, but he did not. Instead, he went with swift steps to his bedroom door, threw open a chiffonier drawer, and took therefrom something small and sinister. She could see the gleam of its polished metal, and she sensed a strange little menace in the click as he did something to it, she could not see what. He came out with his hand in his pocket, as if he had just hidden something there.

"Don't worry," he called as he hurried out the door. "Henry will get anything you need, and I shall soon be back."

The door closed, and he was gone. She heard his quick step down the hall, heard the elevator door slide and slam again. Outside an automobile sounded, and she seemed to hear again his words at the 'phone, "The rear door."

Without stopping to reason it out, she flew across the room and opened the door of the bedroom he had just left, then through it passed swiftly to a bath-room beyond. Yes, there was a window. Would it be the one? Could she see him?

She crowded close to the window. There was a heavy sash with stained glass, but she selected a clear bit of yellow and put her eye close. Yes, there was a closed automobile just below her, and it had started away from the building. He had gone, then. Where?

Her mind was a blank for a few minutes. She went slowly, mechanically, back to the other room.

What did it all mean? He was gone on some dangerous business. He had promised to take precaution—that meant the little, wicked,

gleaming thing in his pocket. Perhaps some harm would come to him, and she would never know! And then she stared at the opposite wall with wonder-filled eyes. Well, and suppose it did? Why did she care? Was he not the man whose power over her but two short days ago would have made her welcome death as her deliverer? Why was all changed now? Had she forgotten the letters? Was she willing to forgive all just because he had declared that he did not write them? How foolish! He said he could prove that he did not, but of course that was all nonsense. He must have written them. And yet there was the wave in his hair, and the kindness in his eyes. And he had looked—oh, he had looked terrible things when he had read that letter; as if he would like to wreak vengeance on the man who had written it. Could a man masquerade that way? And then a new solution to the problem came to her. Suppose this—whoever he was—this man who had married her, had gone out to find and punish George Hayne? Suppose— But then she covered her eyes with her hands and shuddered. Yet why should she care? But she did. Suppose he should be killed, himself!

A quick vision came of their bringing him back to her. He would lie, perhaps, on that great crimson leather couch over there, just as he had lain in the state-room of the train, with his hands hanging limp, and one perhaps across his breast, as if he were guarding something, and his bright waves of brown hair lying heavy about his forehead—only, his forehead would be white, so white and cold, with a little blue mark in his temple perhaps.

The footsteps of the man Henry brought her back to the present again. She smiled at him pleasantly as he entered, and answered his questions about what she would have for breakfast; but it was he who selected the menu, not she, and after he had gone she could not have told what she had ordered. She could not get away from the vision on the couch. She closed her eyes and pressed her cold fingers against her eyeballs to drive it away, but still he seemed to lie there before her.

The colored man came back presently with a loaded tray, and set it down on a little table which he wheeled before her, as though he had done it many times before. She thanked him, and said there was nothing else she needed, so he went away.

She toyed with the cup of delicious coffee which he had poured for her, and the few swallows she took gave her new heart. She broke a bit from a hot roll, and ate a little of the delicious steak, but still her mind was at work on the problem, and her heart was full of nameless anxiety.

He had gone away without any breakfast himself, and he had had no supper the night before, he was sure. He probably had given to her everything he could get on the train. She was haunted with regret because she had not shared with him. She got up and walked about the room, trying to shake off the horror that was upon her.

The walls were tinted a soft greenish gray, and above the picture moulding they blended into a woodsy landscape with a hint of water, greensward, and blue sky through interlacing branches. It reminded her of the little village they had seen as they started from the train in the early morning light.

Two or three fine pictures were hung in good lights. She studied them, and knew that the one who had selected and hung them was a judge of true art; but they did not hold her attention long.

A handsome mahogany desk stood open in a broad space by the window. She was attracted by a little painted miniature of a woman in a delicate gold frame. She took it up and studied the face. It was fine and sweet, with brown hair dressed low, and eyes that reminded her of the man who had just gone from her. Was this, then, the home of some relative with whom he had come to stop for a day or two, and, if so, where was the relative? The dress in the miniature was of a quarter of a century past, yet the face was young and sweet, as young, perhaps, as herself. She wondered who it was. She put the miniature back in place with caressing hand. She felt that she would like to know this woman with the tender eyes. She wished her here now, that she might tell her all her anxiety.

Her eye wandered to the pile of letters, some of them official-looking ones, one or two in square, perfumed envelopes, with high, angular writing. They were all addressed to Mr. Cyril Gordon. That was strange! Who was Mr. Cyril Gordon? What had they—what had she—to do with him? Was he a friend whom George—whom they—were visiting for a few days? It was all bewildering.

She went presently to the back windows to look out, and then to the side ones. Across the house-tops she could catch a glimpse of domes and buildings. There was the Congressional Library, which usually delighted her with its exquisite tones of gold and brown and white. But she had no eyes for it now. Beyond were more buildings, all set in the lovely foliage which was much farther developed than it had been in New York State. From another window she could get a glimpse of the Potomac shining in the morning sun.

She wandered to the front windows and looked out. There were people passing and repassing. It was a busy street, but she could not make out whether it was one she knew or not. There were two men walking back and forth on the opposite side. They did not go further than the corner of the street either way. They looked across at the windows sometimes and looked up when they met, and once one of them took something out of his pocket and flashed it under his coat at his side, as if to have it ready for use. She watched them, fascinated, not able to draw herself away from the window.

Now and then she would go to the rear window, to see if there was

any sign of the automobile returning, and then she would hurry back to the front, to see if the men were still there. Once she returned to the chair, and, lying back, shut her eyes, and let the memory of yesterday sweep over her in all its sweet details.

Meantime, Gordon was speeding away to another part of the city by the fastest time an experienced chauffeur dared to make. About the time they turned the first corner into the avenue, two burly policemen sauntered casually into the pretty square in front of the house where lived the chief of the secret service. There was nothing about their demeanor to show that they had been detailed there by special urgency, and three men who hurried to the little park just across the street from the house could not possibly know that their leisurely and careless stroll was the result of a hurried telephone message from the chief to police headquarters immediately after his message from Gordon.

The policemen strolled by the house, greeted each other, and walked on around the square across the little park. They eyed the three men sitting idly on a bench, and passed leisurely on. They disappeared around a corner, and to the three men were out of the way. The latter did not know the hidden places where the officers took up their watch, and when an automobile appeared, and the three stealthily got up from their park bench and hid themselves in the thick shrubbery near the walk, they knew not that their every movement was observed. But they did wonder how it happened that those two policemen seemed to spring out of the ground suddenly, just as the auto came to a halt in front of the chief's house.

Gordon sprang out and up the steps with a bound, the door opening before him as if he were expected. The two grim and apparently indifferent policemen stood outside like two stone images on guard, while up the street with rhythmic sound rode two mounted police, also coming to a halt before the house as if for a purpose. The three men in the bushes hid their instruments of death, and would have slunk away had there been a chance; but, turning to make a hasty flight, they were met by three more policemen. There was the crack of a revolver as one of the three desperadoes tried a last reckless dash for freedom—and failed. The wretch went to justice with his right arm hanging limp by his side.

Inside the house Gordon was delivering his message, and as he laid it before his chief, and stood silent while the elder man read and pondered its tremendous import, it occurred to him for the first time that his chief would require some report of his journey. His heart stood still with sudden panic. What was he to do? How could he tell it all? What right had he to tell of his marriage to an unknown woman? A marriage that perhaps was not a marriage. He must close his lips until he could talk with her and know her wishes. He drew a sigh of weariness. It was a long, hard way he had come, and it was not over.

The worst ordeal would be his confession to the bride who was not his wife.

The chief looked up.

"Could you make this out, Gordon?" he asked, noting keenly the young man's weary eyes, the strained, tense look about his mouth.

"Oh, yes, sir; I saw it at once. I was almost afraid my eyes might betray the secret before I got away with it."

"Then you know what you have saved the country, and what you have been worth to the service."

The young man flushed with pleasure.

"Thank you, sir," he said, looking down. "I understood it was important, and I am glad I was able to accomplish my errand."

"Have you reason to suppose you were followed, except for what you saw at the station in this city?"

"Yes, sir; I am sure there were detectives after me as I was leaving New York. They were suspicious of me. I saw one of the men who had been at the dinner with me watching me. The disguise—and—some circumstances—threw him off. He was n't sure. Then, there was a man—you know him, Balder—at Pittsburgh——"

"Pittsburgh!"

"Yes, I found it necessary to take the first train that offered, and got off as soon as circumstances permitted. It is rather a long story——"

"And you are all worn-out," put in the kind old chief. "I'll guarantee you did n't sleep much last night."

"Well, no," said Gordon. "I had to sit up in a day-coach and share the seat with another man. Besides, I was somewhat excited."

"Of course, of course!" puffed the old chief, coughing vigorously, and showing by his gruff attitude that he was deeply affected. "Well, young man, this won't be forgotten by the Department. Now do you go home and take a good sleep. Take the whole day off if you wish, and then come down to-morrow morning and tell me all about it. Is there anything more I need to know at once, that justice may be done?"

"I believe not," said Gordon, with a sigh of relief. "There's a list of the men who were at the dinner with me. I wrote them down from my memory last night when I could n't sleep. I also wrote a few scraps of conversation, which will show you just how deep the plot had gone. If I had not read the message and known its import, I should not have understood what they were talking about."

"Did you have any trouble getting off?"

"Not much. Everything seemed prepared for me, even a carriage to take me away from the house quickly. I got into some difficulties, but—I'm here!"

"Yes, you're here, and that's all I need to know at present. Get you home, and don't come to the office until to-morrow morning."

The old chief touched a bell, and a man appeared.

"Jessup, is the coast clear?" he asked.

"Yes, sah," declared the daky. "Dey have jest hed a couple o' shots in de pahk, an' now dey tuk de villains off to der p'lice station. De officers is out dere awaitin' to 'scort de gemman."

"Get home with you, Gordon, and don't come to the office till ten in the morning. Then come straight to my private room."

Gordon thanked him, and left the room, preceded by the gray-haired servant. He was surprised to find the policemen outside, and wondered still more that they seemed to be going one in front and the other behind him as he rode along. He was greatly relieved that he had not been called upon to give the whole story. His heart was filled with anxiety now to get back to the girl, and tell her everything, and yet he dreaded it more than anything he had ever had to face in all his life. He sat back on the cushions, and, covering his face with his hands, tried to think how he should begin; but he could see nothing but her sweet eyes filled with tears, think of nothing but the way she had looked and smiled during the beautiful morning they had spent together in the little town of Milton. Beautiful little Milton! Should he ever see it again?

CHAPTER IX.

CELIA at her window grew more and more nervous as an hour and then another half-hour slipped slowly away, and still he did not come. Then two mounted policemen rode rapidly down the street, following an automobile, in which sat the man for whom she waited.

She had no eyes now for the men who had been lurking across the way, and when she thought to look for them again she saw them running in the opposite direction.

She stood by the window and saw Gordon get out of the car and disappear into the building below; saw the car wheel and curve away and the mounted police take up their stand on either corner; heard the clang of the elevator as it started up, and the clash of its door as it stopped at that floor; heard steps coming on toward the door, and the key in the latch. Then she turned and looked at him, her hands clasped before her and her eyes yearning, glad and frightened all at once.

"Oh, I have been so frightened about you! I am so glad you have come!" she said, and caught her voice in a sob as she took one little step toward him.

He threw his hat upon the floor, wherever it might land, and went to meet her, a great light glowing in his tired eyes, his arms outstretched to hers.

"And did you care?" he asked in a voice of almost awe. "Dear, did you *care* what became of me?"

He had come quite close to her now.

"Oh, yes, I *cared!* I could not help it." There was a real sob in her voice now, though her eyes were shining.

His arms went round her hungrily, as if he would draw her to him in spite of everything; yet he kept them so encircling, without touching her, like a benediction that would enwrap the very soul of his beloved. Looking down into her face, he breathed softly:

"Oh, my dear, it seems as if I must hold you close and kiss you!"

She looked up with bated breath, and thought she understood. Then, with a lovely gesture of surrender, she whispered, "I can trust you." Her lashes were drooping now over her eyes.

"Not until you know all," he said, and put her gently from him into the great arm-chair.

"Then tell me quickly," she said, a swift fear making her weak from head to foot. She laid her hand across her heart, as if to help steady its beating.

He wheeled forward the leather couch opposite her chair, and sat down, his head drooping, his eyes down. He dreaded to begin.

She waited for the revelation, her eyes upon his bowed head.

Finally he lifted his eyes and saw her look, and a tender light came into his face.

"It is a strange story," he said. "I don't know what you will think of me after it is told, but I want you to know that, blundering, stupid, even criminal, though you may think me, I would sooner die this minute than cause you one more breath of suffering."

Her eyes lit up with a wonderful light, and the ready tears sprang into them.

"Please go on," she said softly, and added very gently, "I believe you."

But even with those words in his ears the beginning was not easy. Gordon drew a deep breath and launched forth.

"I am not the man you think," he said, and looked at her to see how she would take it. "My name is not George Hayne, as you think. It is Cyril Gordon."

As one might launch an arrow at a beloved victim and long that it may not strike the mark, so he sent his truth home to her understanding, and waited in breathless silence, hoping against hope that this might not turn her against him.

"Oh!" she breathed softly, as if some puzzle were solving itself. "Oh!"—this time not altogether in surprise, nor as if the fact were displeasing. She looked at him expectantly for further revelation, and he plunged into his story headlong.

"I'm a member of the secret service, headquarters here in Washington, and day before yesterday I was sent to New York on an im-

portant errand. A message of great import, written in a private code, had been stolen from one of our men. I was sent to get it before they could decipher it. The message involved matters of such tremendous significance that I was ordered to go under an assumed name, and on no account to let any one know of my mission. My orders were to get the message, and let nothing hinder me in bringing it with all haste to Washington. I went with the full understanding that I might even be called upon to risk my life."

He looked up. The girl sat wide-eyed, with hands clasped together at her throat.

He hurried on, not to cause her any needless anxiety.

"I won't weary you with details. There were a good many annoying hindrances on the way, which served to make me nervous, but I carried out the programme laid down by my chief, and succeeded in getting possession of the message and making my escape from the house of the man who had stolen it. As I closed the door behind me, knowing that it could be but a matter of a few minutes at longest before six furious men would be on my track, I saw a carriage standing almost before the house. The driver took me for the man he awaited, and I lost no time in taking advantage of his mistake. I jumped in, telling him to drive as fast as he could. I intended to give him further directions, but he had evidently had them from another quarter, and I thought I could call to him as soon as we were out of the dangerous neighborhood.

"He drove like mad, while I hurried to secrete the message so that it would be safe, and to put on a slight disguise—false eyebrows and things the chief had given me. Before I knew where I was, the carriage had stopped before a church——"

The girl gave a low moan, and Gordon, not daring to look up, hurried on with his story:

"There is n't much more to tell that you do not already know. What happened afterward was the result of my extreme perturbation of mind, I suppose. I cannot account for my stupidity and subsequent cowardice in any other way. Neither was it possible for me to explain matters satisfactorily at any time during the whole mix-up, on account of the trust which I carried, and which I could on no account reveal even in confidence, or put in jeopardy in the slightest degree.

"Some one threw open the carriage door, and I heard a voice call, 'Where is the best man?' Then another voice said, 'Here he is!' I took it that they thought I was best man, but would soon discover that I was n't when I came into the light. There was n't any chance to slip away, or I should have done so, and vanished in the dark; but everybody surrounded me, and seemed to think I was all right. I soon saw by their remarks that the man I was supposed to be had been away from

this country for ten years. I tried to explain that there was a mistake, but they misunderstood me and thought I was saying I could n't go in the procession because I had n't practised. I don't just know how I came to be in such a dreadful mess. It would seem as if it ought to have been a very easy thing to say I had got into the wrong carriage and they must excuse me, that I was n't their man, but, you see, they gave me no time to think nor to speak. They just turned me over from one man to another and took everything for granted, and I, finding that I would have to break loose and flee before their eyes if I wished to escape, reflected that there would be no harm in marching down the aisle as best man in a delayed wedding, if that was all there was to do. I could disappear as soon as the ceremony was over, and no one would be the wiser. I can see now that I made a grave mistake in allowing even so much deception, but I did not see any harm in it then. I was at that time entirely taken up with the importance of hiding my message until I could bear it safely to my chief. Nothing else seemed to matter much. They introduced me to your brother—Jefferson. I thought he was the bridegroom, and I thought so until they laid your hand in mine!"

"Oh!" she moaned, and the little hand went to help its mate cover her face.

"I knew it!" he said bitterly. "I knew you would feel just that way as soon as you knew. I don't blame you. I deserve it! I was a fool, a villain, a dumb brute—whatever you have a mind to call me!"

He got up suddenly and strode over to the window, frowning down into the sunlit street, and wondering how it was that everybody seemed to be going on in exactly the same hurry as ever, when for him life had suddenly come to a standstill.

The room was very still. The girl did not even sob. He turned after a moment and went back to that bowed golden head there in the deep crimson chair.

"Look here," he said. "I know you can't ever forgive me. I don't expect it! I don't deserve it! But please don't feel so awfully about it. I'll explain it all to every one. I'll make it all right for you. I'll take every bit of blame on myself, and get plenty of witnesses to prove all about it——"

The girl looked up with sorrow and surprise in her wet eyes.

"Why, I do not blame you," she said mournfully. "I cannot see how you were to blame. It was no one's fault. It was just an unusual happening—a strange set of circumstances. I could not blame you. There is nothing to forgive, and if there were I would gladly forgive it!"

"Then, what on earth makes you feel so distressed?"

"Oh, don't you know?"

"No, I don't," he said. "You're surely not mourning for that brute of a man to whom you had promised to sacrifice your life?"

She shook her head, and buried her face in her hands again. He could see that the tears were dropping between her fingers, and they seemed to fall red hot upon his heart.

"Then, what is it?" He put his hand down softly and touched her bowed head. "Won't you tell me, Dear?" he breathed, and, stooping, knelt beside her.

The sobs ceased, and she was quite still for a moment, while his hand still lay on her hair with that gentle, pleading touch.

"It is—because you married me—in—that way—without knowing— Oh, can't you see how terrible——"

Oh, the folly and blindness of love! Gordon got up from his knees as if she had stung him.

"You need not feel bad about that any more," he said in a hurt tone. "Did I not tell you I would set you free at once? Surely no one in his senses could call you bound under such circumstances."

She was very still for an instant, as if he had struck her, and then she raised her golden head, and a pair of sweet eyes suddenly grown haughty.

"You mean that *I* will set *you* free," she said coldly. "I could not think of letting you be bound by a misunderstanding when you were under great stress of mind. You were in no wise to blame."

"As you please," he retorted bitterly, turning toward the window again. "It all amounts to the same thing. There is nothing for you to feel bad about."

"Yes, there is," she answered, with a quick rush of feeling that broke through her assumed haughtiness. "I shall always feel that I have broken in upon your life. You have had a most trying experience with me, and you never can quite forget it. Things won't be the same——"

"No," said Gordon still bitterly; "things will never be the same for me. I shall always see you sitting there in my chair. I shall always be missing you from it!"

He did not look around, but she was staring at him in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" she asked softly.

He wheeled round upon her. "I mean that I shall never forget you, that I do not want to forget you. I should rather have had these two days of your sweet company than all my lifetime in any other companionship."

"Oh!" she breathed. "Then, why—why did you say what you did about being free?"

"I did n't say anything about being free that I remember. It was you who said that."

"I said I would set you free. I could not, of course, hold you to a bond you did not want——"

"But I did not say I did not want it. I said I would not hold you if *you* did not want to stay."

"Do you mean that if you had known me a little—that is, just as much as you know me now—and had come in there and found out your mistake before it was too late, you would have *wanted* to go on with it?" She waited for his answer breathlessly.

"If you had known me just as much as you do now, and had looked up and seen that it was I and not George Hayne you were marrying, would *you* have wanted to go on and be married?"

Her cheeks grew rosy and her eyes confused.

"I asked you first," she said, with just a flicker of a smile.

He caught the shimmer of light in her eyes, and came toward her eagerly, his own face all aglow now with a dawning understanding.

"Darling," he said, "I can go farther than you have asked. From the first minute my eyes rested upon your face, I wished with all my heart that I might have known you before any other man had found and won you. When you turned and looked at me with that deep sorrow in your eyes, you pledged me with every fibre of my being to fight for you. I was yours from that instant. And when your little hand was laid in mine, my heart went out in longing to have it stay in mine forever. I know now, as I did not understand then, that the real reason for my not doing something to make known my identity at that instant was not because I was afraid of any of the things that might happen, or any scene I might make, but because my heart was fighting for the right to keep what had been given me out of the unknown. You are my wife, by every law of heaven and earth, if your heart will but say yes. I love you as I never knew a man could love, and yet if you do not want to stay with me I will set you free; but it is true that I should never be the same, for I am married to you in my heart, and always shall be. Darling, look up and answer my question now!"

He stood before her with outstretched arms, and for answer she rose and came to him shyly, with downcast eyes.

"I do not want to be set free," she said. "I love you!"

Then gently, tenderly, he folded his arms about her, as if she were too precious to handle roughly, and laid his lips upon hers.

It was the shrill, insistent clang of the telephone bell that broke in upon their bliss. For a moment Gordon let it ring, but its merciless clatter was not to be denied; so, drawing Celia close within his arms, he made her come with him to the 'phone.

To his annoyance, the haughty voice of Miss Bentley answered him.

His arm was about Celia, and she felt his whole body stiffen with annoyance.

"Oh, Miss Bentley! . . . Good morning! . . . Yes, I just reached home this morning. . . . What did you say? . . .

To dine with you? . . . I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it will be impossible. . . . I have another engagement." His arm stole around Celia's waist and caught her hand, holding it close with a meaningful pressure. He smiled, with a grimace toward the telephone, which gladdened her heart. "Pardon me, I did n't hear that," he went on. . . . "Oh, give up my engagement and come? . . . Not possible!" His voice rang with a glad, decided force, and he held still closer the soft fingers in his hand. "Well, I'm sorry you feel that way about it. I certainly am not trying to be disagreeable. . . . No, I could not come to-morrow night either. . . . I cannot make any plans for the next few days. . . . I may have to leave town again. . . . No, of course I did n't do it on purpose. I'm very sorry to disappoint you. . . . Good-by!"

He hung up the receiver with a sigh of relief.

"Who is Miss Bentley?" asked Celia, with natural interest.

"Why, she is—a friend—I suppose you would call her. She has been taking possession of my time lately rather more than I really enjoyed. Still, she is a nice girl. You'll like her, I think; but I hope you'll never get too intimate. I should n't like to have her continually around. She——" he paused and finished, laughing—"she makes me tired."

"I was afraid that she was a very dear friend—that she might be some one you cared for——"

"You need n't worry, I never did," he said. "I tried to consider her in that light one day, because I'd been told repeatedly that I ought to settle down, but the thought of having her with me always was—well—intolerable. The fact is, you reign supreme in a heart that has never loved another girl. I did n't know there was such a thing as love like this. I knew I lacked something, but I did n't know what it was. This is greater than all the gifts of life, this gift of your love. And that it should come to me in this beautiful, unsought way seems too good to be true!"

He drew her to him once more and looked down into her lovely face, as if he could not drink enough of its sweetness.

"And to think you are willing to be my wife! My wife!" and he folded her close again.

A discreet tap on the door announced the arrival of the man Henry, and Gordon roused to the necessity of ordering lunch.

He stepped to the door with a happy smile and held it open.

"Come in a minute, Henry," he said. "This is my wife. I hope you will henceforth take her wishes as your special charge, and do for her as you have done so faithfully for me."

The man's eyes shone with pleasure as he bowed low before the gentle lady.

"I is very glad to heah it, sah, and I offers you my congratchumlations, sah, and de lady, too. She can't find no bettah man in the whole United States dan Mars' Gordon. I's mighty glad you done gat ma'ied, sah, an' I hopes you bofe have a mighty fine life."

The luncheon was served in Henry's best style, and his dark face shone as he stepped noiselessly about, putting silver and china and glass in place, and casting admiring glances at the lady, who stood holding the miniature in her hand and asking questions with a gentle voice:

"Your mother, you say? How dear she is! And she died so long ago! You never knew her? Oh, how strange and sweet and pitiful to have a beautiful girl-mother like that!"

She put out her hand to his in the shelter of the deep window, and they thought Henry did not see the look and touch that passed between them; but he discreetly averted his eyes and smiled benignly at the salt-cellars and the celery he was arranging. Then he hurried out to a florist's next door and returned with a dozen white roses, which he arranged in a queer little crystal pitcher, one of the few articles belonging to his mother that Gordon possessed.

CHAPTER X.

IT was after they had finished their delightful luncheon, and Henry had cleared the table and left the room, that Gordon remarked:

"I wonder what has become of George Hayne. Do you suppose he means to try to make trouble?"

Celia's hands fluttered to her throat with a little gesture of fear.

"Oh!" she said. "I had forgotten him! How terrible! He will do *something*, of course. He will do *everything*. He will probably carry out all his threats. How could I have forgotten! Perhaps Mamma is now in great distress. What can we do? What can *I* do?"

She looked up at him helplessly, and his heart bounded at the thought that she was his to protect as long as life should last.

"Don't be frightened," he soothed her. "He cannot do anything very dreadful, and if he tries we'll soon silence him. What he has written in those letters is blackmail. He is simply a big coward, who will run and hide as soon as he is exposed."

"Oh, do you think so? But Mamma! Poor Mamma! It will kill her! And George will stop at nothing when he is crossed."

"We must telephone your mother at once and set her heart at rest. Then we can find out just what ought to be done."

Celia's face was radiant at the thought of speaking to her mother.

"Oh, how beautiful! Why did n't I think of that before! What perfectly dear things telephones are!"

With one accord, they went to the telephone table.

"Will you call them up, or shall I?" he asked.

"You call, and then I will speak to Mamma," she said, her eyes shining with her joy in him. "I want them to hear your voice again. They can't help knowing you are all right when they hear your voice."

For that, he gave her a glance very much worth having.

"Just how do you account for the fact that you did n't think I was all right yesterday afternoon? I have a very realizing sense that you did n't. I used my voice to the best of my ability, but it did no good then."

"Well, you see, that was different! There were those letters to be accounted for. Mamma and Jeff don't know anything about the letters."

"And what are you going to tell them now?"

She drew her brows down a minute and thought.

"You'd better find out how much they already know," he suggested. "If this George Hayne has n't turned up yet, perhaps you can wait until you can write, or we might be able to go up to-morrow and explain it ourselves."

"Oh, could we? How lovely!"

"I think we could," said Gordon. "I'm sure I can make it possible. Of course, you know a wedding journey is n't exactly in the programme of the secret service, but I might be able to work them for one. I surely can in a few days if this Holman business does n't hold me up. I may be needed for a witness. I'll have to talk with the chief first."

"Oh, how perfectly beautiful! Then you call them up, and just say something pleasant—anything, you know—and then say I'll speak to Mamma."

She gave him the number, and in a few minutes a voice from New York said, "Hello!"

"Hello!" called Gordon. "Is this Mr. Jefferson Hathaway? . . . Well, this is your new brother-in-law. How are you all? . . . Your mother recovered from all the excitement and weariness? . . . That's good. . . . What's that? . . . You've been trying to 'phone us in Chicago? . . . But we're not in Chicago. We changed our minds and came to Washington instead. . . . Yes, we're in Washington—the Harris Apartments. We are thinking of running up to see you to-morrow. We've a lot of things to explain to you. . . . What did you say? . . . A crazy man? . . . Claims to be George Hayne? . . . Oh, that's a shame! . . . But we understand all about him. . . . That's one of the things we're coming to explain. . . . Don't let him worry—Mother. He's a rascal, and I'll see that he gets what he deserves. . . . Here is Celia. She wants to speak to you."

Celia, her eyes shining, her lips quivering with suppressed excitement, took the receiver.

"Oh, Jeff dear, it's all true, all those nice things you said to me just before you got off the train. He's just as nice as you said, and a great deal nicer. Oh, yes, I'm very happy, and I want to speak to Mamma, please."

"I'm going to tell her, dear," she said, looking up at Gordon.

For answer he stooped and kissed her, and his arm encircled her the rest of the time she talked.

"Is that you, Mamma? . . . Dear Mamma! Yes, I'm all safe and happy, and I'm so sorry you have worried. We won't let you do it again. But listen, Mamma, I did not marry George Hayne at all. You thought I did, but I did n't. . . . Yes, I was *married* all right, but I did n't marry George. Mother, George is a wicked man. I can't tell you over the 'phone, but you'll be perfectly satisfied when you know all about it. . . . No, there's nothing whatever for you to worry about. . . . He is very dear. You'll love him. . . . What's his name? Oh!"—she looked up at Gordon with a funny little expression of dismay. She had forgotten, and he whispered it in her ear.

"Cyril Gordon, Mother," she said, giggling in spite of herself at her strange predicament. . . . "Yes, Mother. I am very, very happy. I could n't be happier unless I had you and Jeff, too, and"—she paused, hesitating at the unaccustomed name—"and Cyril says we're coming to visit you to-morrow. We'll explain everything. Oh, Mother, you don't know what I've escaped! What? You want to speak to him? He's right here. Good-by, Mother dear, till to-morrow."

Gordon took the receiver.

"Mother, I'm taking good care of her, just as I promised. She is the best thing that ever came into my life."

Then a mother's blessing came thrilling over the wires, and touched the handsome, manly face with tenderness.

"Thank you," he said. "I shall try always to make you glad you said those words."

They returned to looking in each other's eyes, after the receiver was hung up, as if they had been parted a long time. It seemed somehow as if their joy must be greater than any other married couple's, because they had all their courting yet to do.

There was so much on both sides to be told; so many hopes and experiences to be exchanged; so many opinions to compare. Then there were the rooms to be gone through, and Gordon's pictures and favorite books to look at and talk about, and plans for the future to be touched upon—just barely touched upon.

The apartment would do until they could look about and get a house, Gordon said, his heart swelling with the proud thought that at last he would have a real home, like his married friends, with a real princess to preside over it.

Then Celia had to tell all about the horror of the last three months, with the unpleasant shadows of the preceding years back of it. She told this in the dusk of the evening, before Henry had come in to light up, and before they had realized that it was almost dinner-time. She told it with her face hidden on her husband's shoulder, and his arms close about her, to give her comfort at each revelation of the story. They tried also to plan what to do about George Hayne.

But to Celia's mind the most beautiful glory of the whole day came when Gordon told her that he would be glad if her mother and brother would come and live with them. He knew without asking that it would please her. It seemed to her then that her cup of gladness was full to the brim.

The next morning quite early the 'phone called Gordon to the office. The chief's secretary said the matter was urgent.

Gordon entered his chief's office a trifle anxiously, for he felt that, in justice to his wife, he ought to take her right back to New York and get matters there adjusted; but he feared that there would be business to hold him at home until the Holman matter was settled.

The chief greeted him affably and bade him sit down.

"I am sorry to have called you up so early," he said, "but we needed you. The fact is, they've arrested Holman and five other men, and you are in immediate demand to identify them. Would it be asking too much of an already overworked man to send you back to New York to-day?"

Gordon almost sprang from his seat in pleasure.

"It just exactly fits in with my plans, or, rather, my wishes," he said, smiling. "I've something to confess to you. I didn't tell you before, because it was a long story, and I didn't like to bring in my private affairs when there was business of so much more importance."

He paused and looked at his chief, half hesitating.

"Go on, sir. You've earned a right to attend to your own affairs, I think."

"Thank you," said Gordon. "Well, then, I'll be brief. Circumstances in the family of the girl who was to become my wife were such that it seemed advisable for us to be married at once. My going to New York seemed opportune. We were married without any delay, and I brought my wife back with me. It may seem to you that I took a risk in doing this, but I assure you that it has been a protection all the way through. Twice, I am sure, her presence threw my pursuers off the track."

"Were you married before or after securing the message?" The chief was watching him with keen eyes.

"Immediately after," answered Gordon. "I went at once from Holman's house to her, and we left without delay. At the station watching for me was one of the men whom I had seen at the Holman dinner,

but the disguise and the lady completely puzzled him, so that he did not dare attempt anything. I boarded a Chicago train because the circumstances were such that it seemed the best thing to do, but we got off the train very early in the morning, while waiting on a side-track, and escaped by way of Pittsburgh."

Gordon could not tell from the chief's face whether he was displeased or not.

"Did you have to tell your wife or any one else of your mission?"

"Not a soul. They supposed I had come to be married. It had been in the plan to go to Chicago, so I let them suppose I had gone there. It was not necessary to say anything of my special business in New York."

"Suppose it had been?"

"Then, I should not have been married. Under no circumstances should I have revealed my reason for being there."

"Very good," said the chief, his features relaxing. "I believe that you would not. I congratulate you, sir, and wish you all happiness. I shall take great pleasure in congratulating the lady at my earliest opportunity. I only hope she is worthy of so noble a husband."

"She is far too good for me," said Gordon humbly, his eyes shining with pleasure over the words of his chief. "I shall be proud to have you see her. It is for her sake that I want to return to New York to-day, for there are several matters we should like to settle up, as we came away so hurriedly."

"That is good," said the chief, smiling. "Then we need not feel so badly at having to send you back. Can you go on the noon train? Well, then, with your permission, I shall take the privilege of seeing you off and congratulating your wife. Now just step here a moment. I have something to show you."

He flung open the door to the next office.

"You knew that Ferry had left the Department on account of his ill-health? I have taken the liberty of having your things moved in here. This will hereafter be your headquarters, and you will be next to me in the Department."

Gordon turned in amazement and gazed at the kindly old face. Promotion he had hoped for, but such promotion, right over the heads of his elders and superiors, he had never dreamed of receiving. He could have taken the chief in his arms.

"Pooh! Pooh!" said the chief. "You deserve it, you deserve it!" when Gordon tried to blunder out some words of appreciation. Then, as if to cap the climax, he added:

"And, by the way, you know some one has got to run across the water to look after that Stanhope matter. That will fall to you, I'm afraid. Sorry to keep you trotting around the globe, but perhaps you'll

like to take your wife with you. She may enjoy the trip, and, of course, the Department 'll give you a little extra time for a wedding trip. Oh, don't thank me! It's simply the reward of doing your duty, to have more duties given you, and higher ones. You have done well, young man. I'll bring all the papers in the Stanhope case, and full directions, with me to the station, and then you need n't return, unless it suits your pleasure. Good-morning, sir. I know you will want to hurry back and get ready for your journey."

He pressed Gordon's hand with heartiness and ushered him out into the hall, with the same brusque manner he used to close all business interviews, and Gordon found himself hurrying through the familiar halls in a daze of happiness.

About the time when Gordon and his happy bride boarded the train at Washington for New York, with the kindly smile of the chief of the secret service upon him, and his pleasant words ringing in their ears, a ship sailed out of New York harbor.

At the port-hole of one of the state-rooms, looking gloomily out across the water, stood a heavy, dark-visaged man. He had raged for two futile days at the relatives of the girl he was to have married; and finally, on leaving the house of Mrs. Hathaway for the third time, with the assurance that the missing bride and her husband were returning to face him, he was met by the man who had been his victim in a gigantic swindle and whom he supposed dead. This man laid violent hands upon him and was about to have him arrested when he broke away and escaped. He managed to get to the wharf and on board this vessel. It mattered not to him that it was a slow-sailing craft and bound for a port to which he had never been. He had escaped, and only he and his pursuer knew from what he had escaped. It would not be safe for him ever to return to America. He must disguise himself and flee to a world where he was not known. And Celia, and a fortune, had so nearly been his own! Then might he have paid his debts and lived in luxury. But now it was all lost. The baffled blackguard stood and looked upon the water beneath him and saw in its sullen depths the stern reality of thwarted wishes. The sunlight gave no joyous sparkle, for nothing sparkled for him any more.

Straight into the sunshine and brightness of a new and beautiful life together rode Celia and her husband.

"Dear," said Gordon, as he seated himself close beside her, "has it occurred to you that you are probably the only bride who ever married the best man at her wedding?"

Celia smiled appreciatively for a minute, and then replied mischievously:

"I suppose every bride *thinks* her husband is the best man."

THE DRIFTER

By Forbes Lindsay

For to possess in loneliness
The joy of all the earth.

IT is given to only a few favored mortals to know the Drifter. To meet him adrift, and more particularly to gain his friendship, one must be something of a drifter himself. The mere globe-trotter seldom encounters him, because the Drifter avoids the beaten tracks and the busy mid-stream. The ordinary traveller only occasionally glimpses this cosmopolitan tramp, just as at home one only casually sights the native hobo.

The Drifter is confounded in the minds of some persons with the beach-comber; but this is a great mistake, and a gross affront to the Drifter. He has nothing in common with the miserable specimen of humanity who deserts his ship and seeks some secluded spot where he may shake off all responsibilities of life and revel in the unrestrained indulgence of his animal propensities.

It is equally fallacious and unfair to compare the Drifter with the fugitive from justice, spurred to constant change of locality by fear and remorse. His feverish flitting from place to place is as much like the Drifter's placid, careless wanderings as is the dreamy meandering of a cow through the meadow to the frenzied scurrying of a terrier with a fire-cracker spluttering at his rump. Moreover, there is this paramount distinction, that, while the Drifter's career generally ends in some haven of ease and rest, the flight of the criminal inevitably leads into an ultimate cul-de-sac, for nowadays the arm of the law has a limitless reach, and its pursuit is as relentless and sure as the operation of the mills of the gods.

The Drifter is a being in whom the primal nomadic instinct is inherent. Perhaps it is the resurgence of the spirit of some Viking or Phœnician ancestor. Chance or accident usually sets him adrift. Soon the wanderlust is aroused, and anchorage becomes distasteful. Occasionally, he has some small independent means, is a "remittance man," or makes an irregular livelihood by taking photographs, or something of the sort. But the true Drifter—the man who gets the utmost out of his peculiar mode of life—is a care-free vagabond, unencumbered by

material possessions or dependent relations, living from hand to mouth, here to-day and gone to-morrow. His existence is not, however, an unbroken glut of *dolce far niente*. Now and again he has to work, in order to live and move. At times the tide flows strongly against him, and then he discloses a latent energy, an extent of resource, and a degree of ingenuity that are surprising.

The Drifter shuns the places where the current of life is swift. You will not meet him in Europe, nor often in the United States, but he is to be found in every port of the Orient and South America, always keeping in touch with the sea routes, generally just arrived or on the point of leaving. He abhors the railroad, and prefers a sailing ship to a steamer. And this is altogether in keeping with his system of philosophy. He consumes time as a connoisseur drinks a glass of rare wine, in slow, senseful sips, to the last drop. Each day contains for him twenty-four hours, and every hour, sixty full minutes. Under an appearance of phlegmatic self-content and indolent nonchalance, he is keenly alive. Nothing escapes his observation, and few things surpass his comprehension. He is niggardly of speech, but when he falls in with a fellow bird-of-passage, or with a sympathetic soul who can see things from his point of view, he will draw freely from his rich experience and tell wondrous tales of strange happenings on sea and land—tales of treasure, tales of tropic love, tales of demigods and devils, tales of plots, of graft and revolution.

The Drifter is inclined to keep along the edges. He feels cramped in the interior. Also, the chances of securing temporary employment are much less up-country than on the coast, and the cost of travel is much greater on land than by water. Besides which, he appreciates the advantages of being within hailing distance of one of his consuls. The Spanish-American people are likely to treat the stray sheep rather roughly when they believe that his bleat will not be heard by a representative of his country.

I once knew a veteran drifter who was tempted into a disregard of these considerations, with sad consequences. He made a journey across the Tepic Territory with a companion, intending to prospect in the Sierra Madre, but they were arrested—ostensibly for an infraction of the laws, in reality on account of a personal quarrel with some petty *alcalde*—and passed three awful months in the *carcel* of an out-of-the-way *pueblo*. Six months after his release, my friend died in San Francisco from the effects of his confinement, not the least painful feature of which, to a man of his habit, must have been the restriction of his movements to an area of eight square feet.

Follows an outline tracing of the wanderings during four years of a drifter who ultimately married and settled down. (He is now cashier of a bank in Melbourne, but every few years he takes an indeterminate

trip on a tramp steamer, in satisfaction of the repressed but not eradicated desire to drift.)

He was sent down to Demerara by an American company which shortly failed and left him stranded. His drifting commenced when he joined a German naturalist on an expedition into the interior of Guiana. At the close of this service he was in possession of sufficient money to carry him home, but the wanderlust had seized him, and instead of heading north he sailed south. His subsequent roving took him in succession to Rio, Buenos Aires, inland to Mendoza, back to Buenos Aires, Colon, across the Isthmus to Panama, Guayaquil, Panama, Punta Arenas, Panama, San Francisco, Honolulu, Yokohama, Shanghai, Sydney, the Caroline Islands, Sydney, Shanghai, Manila, Hongkong, Singapore, Calcutta, Colombo, Bombay, overland to Calcutta, Melbourne, Sydney, Shanghai, Yokohama, Manila, Panama, Valparaiso, Lima, Quito, Guayaquil, Panama, Manila, Hongkong, and Melbourne.

These were only the main points. There were a number of minor excursions, several journeys into the interior, an expedition to an uninhabited Pacific island in search of mythical treasure, and a string of more or less strange adventures. He was shipwrecked, laid low by yellow fever, and escaped three attempts on his life. He planned and played the principal part in a daring jail delivery at Bogota. He discovered a cinnabar deposit and sold the information for two thousand dollars to a company which has since made more than a million out of it. He performed an important service, at the risk of his life, for the lately deceased President of a South American republic, and received a large grant of land in compensation.

This case is typical and almost commonplace in comparison with the experience of some drifters. I knew one who covered upwards of eighty thousand miles of land and water in twenty months, and another, whose beard was not full grown, yet who had gone through adventures that cast De Rougemont's fancy-flights into deep shade.

I have known the Drifter under all manner of conditions. I have met him at Spence's Hotel in Calcutta, enjoying his *otium cum dignitate* after a lucky strike. He has pared my corns for a dollar in Bahia Blanca. I have paid his board-bill for a week in Maranhao, for the sake of his company. We have been guests together at a President's table, and have shared the shelter of a fisherman's hut. He has given me much valuable information, and has done me more than one good turn.

One who knows the tribe will never hesitate to help a drifter in need, for he himself is the most generous, open-handed soul in creation. One of the species had worked for months as a shipping-clerk at La Guaira, with the sole object of getting away as soon as his

means should permit. It is not a place to hold one, at the best, and an outbreak of yellow fever made it more than ever unattractive at that time. The drifter had saved about two hundred dollars, and sailing day was in sight, when he happened to hear of an American who lacked the money to go to the States, where his wife was seriously ill. Deducting only fifteen dollars, the drifter turned over his hard-earned savings to his fellow-countryman, who was almost a stranger, nevertheless, and settled down to another long spell of loathsome bondage, with a smiling face and a heavy heart.

Generally the Drifter has had a decent upbringing, and often betrays the possession of a college education. One night in Pernambuco he conversed learnedly on ethnology and natural history, and afterwards played the piano in a masterly manner and sang with a degree of ability that would have insured him a good living in light opera.

I had the good luck to put up in my bungalow at Serampore three men who had drifted together by chance in Calcutta from widely-parted points of the compass. One was the brother of a British peer, another the son of a dignitary of the Church of England, and the third had been sloughed by one of the F. F. V. The first was the recipient of a regular allowance, its continuance conditioned on his keeping out of Europe; the second lectured—and uncommonly well at that—when the need of money arose; and the last could do almost anything, and had followed more than a score of recognized callings, as well as a few pursuits that are not classified in directories.

It goes without saying that the art of drifting necessitates the exercise of more than ordinary intelligence. Only a man of brains can travel about the world indefinitely, without any certain means. The Drifter's mental equipment is almost always of a high order, and would insure him success in the ordinary paths of life but for the fact of his being handicapped with the temperament of a Bedouin. He can see an opportunity more readily than most men, and is a rare judge of human nature, especially the peculiar brands of it that are prevalent in Asia and Spanish America.

Although the Drifter's comings and goings are devoid of set purpose, he always has an eye to the main chance, and will jump at an opportunity to make money, if it can be accomplished by a *coup*. If it necessitates slow and sustained effort, he will have none of it, no matter how sure the prospect. He is a perpetual refutation of the hoary adage, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." In the majority of cases he ends his days in a well-feathered nest of his own making.

Drifters have become kings of rich territories, commanders of dusky armies, generals and admirals in the services of Japan and China, ministers of state, advisers and secret agents of powerful rulers. They have discovered mines, secured concessions, devised new methods of

trade, developed new industries, and in a hundred different ways made fortunes, sometimes running into the millions, in an incredibly short time.

A drifter organized the postal service of Japan, another suggested the frozen-meat trade of Argentina; a third originated the railway system of China. The Russo-Japanese War made millionaires of two penniless drifters. A drifter accumulated several hundred thousand dollars in a few months as secret agent for Zelaya. Paul Kruger paid a heavy commission to a drifter for contriving the transfer of a large amount of cash from Pietermaritzburg to Antwerp.

These, however, are only the fortunate few. More often, the Drifter's declining years are spent in the snug seclusion of some little bight in the bank, where the tide of life is scarcely felt. Here he drowns through eventless days, trafficking in tortoise-shell or collecting copra by way of diversion. Perhaps he mates with a dusky daughter of the land, and in that case his end is not edifying. For when the white man marries a brown woman he inevitably sinks to her level—never raises her to his. Another strange thing about it is that the children will inherit the characteristics of their mother, rather than those of their sire.



THE POET TO HIS LOVE

BY NORMA BRIGHT CARSON

I LOVED thee, dear, before the worlds were made,
Before God set the sun to give the day,
And ere he placed the singing stars where they
A light might bring to souls who humbly prayed;
Ere yet the moon through clouds of silver strayed,
Or ere the lightnings did God's wrath betray,
With thunder's roar that does all life dismay—
I loved thee, dear, before the seas were laid.

And I shall love thee, dear, when this old world
Shall have its flag of triumph long since furled;
In some far age and in surroundings new
My soul shall yet again discover you.
For as the tides of ocean ebb and flow,
So surges through the years this love we know.

THE MASTER STROKE

By *Hapsburg Liebe*

"LET us sit here, Haynes," suggested Embrey, as we reached a stone seat in the palm-shaded square before the little capitol. Embrey, an old college-mate whom I was visiting, was the American consul at San Bernardino, chief city of a Central American country that we shall call Valmonda.

"I pointed out to you this morning most of the persons who are keeping this a prosperous republic," Embrey went on. "Now I 'm going to show you the man who made it possible—in everlasting marble. He was a son of the present ruler; his name was Carlos Reynaldo, but he has been known as *Carlos el Magno* since his master stroke saved his country from becoming a scar on the face of civilization. Look, Haynes, over there."

He waved his hand toward a statue set on a great square pedestal, in the centre of a group of stately palms. It was the likeness, in pure white marble, of a young man standing erect and tense, the right hand resting on a section of ship's rail. I straightened with deep interest, for, except for their masculinity, the features in stone were the exact counterpart of those of the dark-eyed, sad-faced Señora Ramon Loban, wife of the Secretary of State, one of those whom Embrey had shown me from his window.

"I brought you before the statue to tell you about it," my friend continued. "I want you to know about it before you meet the Reynaldos and Lobans at the President's ball to-night. You 'll like them so much more, Haynes."

And he told me the following story of Carlos Reynaldo, a hero unknown save in the annals of his country's history.

As is not uncommon with peoples of a tropical climate, the Valmondans were quick to love or to hate, to live or to die. In company with hereditary tendencies from irascible Spanish ancestors, there was born in them the fire of the sun and the restlessness of the sea, and they were ever on nettles—until the tyranny of President Horus del Sangre cured them body and soul. They had discarded Benito Reynaldo for Horus del Sangre, exchanging a wise and good man for a ruler who vied as a despot with the Roman Nero.

They soon realized their terrible mistake. Horus, a tall, slender Mephisto of a man, proved a vampire who revelled in bleeding his subjects to the heart, a volcano ready and eager to destroy with the scalding lava of his power. Once the reins of government had been firmly grasped, he began to discharge the native soldiers, filling their places with characterless renegades from other countries. Soon the only Valmondans in his army were a few despicable creatures upon whom he believed he could depend. He was lavish with his soldiery, giving even the privates extravagant allowances and liberties. All this, of course, to make his position as a despot more secure.

The deposed ruler, old Benito Reynaldo, had barely escaped with his life and the lives of his family. However, after the tyrant and his cohorts had turned their attention to things bacchanalian, Reynaldo had stolen from his hiding-place in the hills and had again set up his household in San Bernardino. To avoid notice, he moved into the ruins of what had once been a magnificent dwelling in the outskirts of the city, on the north bay-shore. In this household, besides the husband and wife, were a son and a daughter.

Although he felt that he was defying the knife with his neck, old Reynaldo was secretly trying to bring about a revolt. There was no motive of personal gain; Benito Reynaldo loved his people. Those who knew of the movement were with the ex-president in his hopes; but, while they deeply regretted that they had set up in his stead a vampire, most of them feared the vampire so much that they were reluctant to take up arms to change their country's destiny.

A new atrocity was to be perpetrated by President Horus del Sangre.

In the gloom of late twilight, in one of the few habitable rooms of the old stone pile, Benito Reynaldo was in the keenest anguish of his life. Now he crumpled silently in agony of spirit; now he straightened with a righteous curse. He began to pace the floor, his fists clenched. Hoary with the touch of years, yet erect of stature, he seemed a poignant combination of age and youth. From behind a curtained doorway his daughter Flora watched him. She was awed by his emotion, awed until she forgot its cause and thought only of him. Suddenly she confronted him, her beautiful eyes dry from the fire of pain.

"Don't!" she begged, on her knees, her hands clasped and held upward to his arms, which were now folded. "Don't! We are but the puppets of fate. Of what use is it to worry so? Surely we can find some country that will welcome us!"

What her parent might have said was cut short by the entrance of his son, Carlos, a dark, strong man in all the glory of early manhood. Carlos was smiling; he had not yet heard.

But he soon felt the spirit of gloom that pervaded the atmosphere. "What has happened?" he breathed, his countenance growing serious.

"What has happened?" repeated Benito Reynaldo, his lined face quivering. "Horus del Sangre has ordered that we leave the country within sixty days. How can we leave Valmonda to suffer on without our aid?" He stopped, choking. Then he continued bitterly, "Why, oh, why does Heaven permit that hound of perdition to blot the earth with his existence!"

Carlos Reynaldo loved Valmonda, too. He was pallid with indignation; his heart was in the very vitriol of anger; his soul was in sackcloth and ashes for the people who had, in a moment of blindness, set up the terrible Horus in his father's place. Scarcely controlling himself, he led his sister to the doorway, kissed her, and bade her leave them. And, wet-eyed with sudden despair, Flora went to kneel at the crucifix.

Carlos lighted a candle. Possessing a remarkable power of will for one so young, he seemed to take hold and calm himself without visible effort. He helped his parent to a settee and stood towering over him.

"It was wrong in the people to listen to Horus del Sangre," he deprecated. "Still, there is nothing to be gained by blaming them for it now. The thing to do is to *undo* the mistake. We must rise and strangle the black-heart who sits in power over Valmonda. It may cost us lives, but it is surely better to sacrifice a few lives than to live supine under the present rule. We must arm those who will fight, and fight."

"We have sixty days," old Reynaldo said. "If we could get even a third of the army on our side——"

"But we cannot," Carlos interrupted. "The army is living on the best the land affords; and the army is not to be trusted. We must rise among ourselves; we must conquer by the might of desperation."

"But," observed the ex-president, "we should have to smuggle in guns, which is a dangerous thing to attempt. An edict has been issued to the effect that persons found in possession of any weapons except fowling-pieces and machetes will be punished."

This was a blow to young Reynaldo. "The shrewd Horus is taking precautions," he frowned. "When did you learn that?"

"This afternoon," answered the father. "And I learned also that the ports and the border are being watched closely."

"Poor Valmonda is on her knees, under the lash," Carlos murmured sadly. "How many men could we muster to handle guns if we had them?"

"Many are cowed," said old Benito, "yet we might find a thousand men who would be willing to give their lives, if need be, for liberty. That is not enough, I fear. The army numbers more than that."

"Yes, the army numbers more than that," the son agreed. "Besides, there are two war-ships."

"Two war-ships," repeated the elder Reynaldo. "If you are think-

ing of bringing rifles in, Carlos, think well. It would be fatal to be discovered; and it is hard to accomplish anything without its getting to the tyrant's ears."

"Let me sleep over it," Carlos said thoughtfully. "I must find some way by which to make a master stroke."

"But——"

Benito Reynaldo broke off as two figures entered the room. One of them was Flora; the other was her fiancé, the son of the former secretary of state. Ramon Loban was young, strong, and a firm advocate of the new revolt.

"Pardon, señores!" he cried, offering his hands to the two Reynaldos. "Flora—*la niña de mis ojos!*—has told me. You have my sympathy, and if you go I shall accompany you. However, I myself shall go to Horus, first, and ask him to reconsider. I saved him a fall from his horse recently, and perhaps he will remember it."

"It would avail nothing," declared the ex-president gloomily. "Horus hates us, and his knowing that you are our friend would make him hate you. Don't, Ramon. But we are grateful, indeed."

"You must not," Carlos added. "It would be dangerous for you."

The friendship of Ramon and Carlos had dated from their toddling days; they had been called David and Jonathan. Thus was Carlos anxious lest his friend incur the displeasure of the tyrannical President and be made to suffer because of it. But, despite the protesting of the Reynaldos, Ramon decided to pay Horus del Sangre a visit on the morrow.

Two hours after young Loban's departure, Carlos went to his room in the lower part of the old stone pile, and threw himself across his bed without having undressed. There was surely something that could be done to throttle the despotic rule. Lying there in the dark, he tried hard to think of some form of strategy that would not fail; for to fail was to die.

Several hours later he rose and crept out to the starlit night. It was but a short distance to the holy church of Saint Mary. Thither he went; stealthily he opened the door and felt his way in the darkness until he stood beneath the sacred figure at the altar. There he knelt humbly, and prayed to know how to make the master stroke. But the message did not come. Disappointed, he stole back to his home and went to bed.

When he again opened his eyes a way had been opened unto him. It had been suggested by a dream of being in a storm at sea.

He at once dressed himself and sought his father, whom he found walking in the garden. It had been a magnificent garden, as was attested by the ruins of fountains, carved stone seats, and moss-grown stone lions and vases. Vines and flowers grew in a rank disarray, fill-

ing the air with a perfume that mingled with the fresh breath of the morning.

"Father," smiled Carlos, laying a gentle hand on old Reynaldo's arm, "I have a wonderful idea. There is not a chance in a thousand of its failing. But I must have money to buy and equip sumptuously a large steam yacht—and more besides."

"But why should you equip a vessel sumptuously if it is to be used for fighting?" queried old Reynaldo.

"Not that," Carlos disavowed, smiling mysteriously. "A thousand men armed with fowling-pieces and machetes will comprise the fighting force, and they will win easily with the help of a bit of strategy I propose to put into effect. They must be ready when I give the signal. I will open the way for them."

"What——"

"It need not be a new vessel," Carlos interrupted, with enthusiasm, "but it should take paint easily, and look presentable. I think one could buy such a yacht at a low figure in Rio de Janeiro."

The ex-president was mystified. "Can you not tell me——"

Again did Carlos interrupt his sire. "No, I cannot tell you," he said. "You must trust to me. I will save the people of Valmonda from the hand of the despot; and I will avenge all the wrongs Horus del Sangre has ever done. I can say no more."

And he continued to turn a deaf ear to his father's pleading to be enlightened concerning the plan.

They spent an hour talking of the expense. They doubted their ability to gather the necessary funds within sixty days; but it was their only chance, and they decided to begin the work immediately.

Then there was a stir in the shrubbery behind them. They started, thinking it a spy. However, it proved to be the former secretary of state, old Eugenio Loban, a good man and a true one to any righteous cause, and a firm believer in the new revolt. His face was white with rage; his lips foamed as with madness. Straight to the Reynaldos he walked—or, rather, crept, a blood-lusting, primitive man, a man made into a devil. He whispered, for he could not speak aloud for the choke of his hot anger, and Benito Reynaldo shrank from him when he heard the gritted, disjointed words.

At sight of the horror on his father's countenance, Carlos stepped forward, eager to share the unpleasant tidings.

Benito Reynaldo understood the questioning look. "My son," he murmured, "I fear to tell you. My tongue is loath to say this awful thing."

But Eugenio Loban told it. And he seemed to speak aloud only with a great effort.

"Ah, God!" he groaned, falling to his knees, weak and pitiful in

his emotion. "Ah, God, dost Thou live? Didst Thou see it, God, without raising Thy hand to stop it? Didst Thou see him, my son, the light of my life even as Thy Son was the light of the world, stabbed? My son, as noble a youth as Thy hand hath ever moulded—*stabbed!* . . . Oh, Thou art unfair——"

"Hush, Eugenio Loban!" Benito Reynaldo, himself in torment, clapped a hand over Loban's raving mouth. "Hush, my friend! God's Son was nailed hand and foot. Perhaps God wept as you weep. At least, He understands."

Calmer, Loban faced Carlos, who stood motionless as his statue stands to-day.

"Carlos," he said, "Ramon went to Horus del Sangre and asked on his knees that you and yours might not be banished. The drink-soaked spawn of demons plunged a dagger into his back as he knelt."

Carlos Reynaldo loved Ramon Loban as he loved Valmonda. He swayed, stricken, about to fall. His father caught him. His face was death-white. His eyes seemed to turn all black. His lips were purple and shrunken. A few words crept from his mouth, words so heavy that they fell one by one, like drops of blood:

"My—Ramon—dead—stabbed——"

Eugenio Loban recovered much at seeing the acute suffering of this friend to his son. "He is not dead," he corrected; "but the doctors have said that he has only one chance in a hundred."

Flora Reynaldo did not faint when she heard of her lover's peril. To faint would have meant a loss of time. She hurried to the wounded Ramon.

The Reynaldos, together with Eugenio Loban and a few others, immediately set about collecting money for the secret project.

And it was accomplished much sooner than they had expected. But Eugenio Loban had sold everything he possessed; his wife had sold her jewels. Benito Reynaldo had sold a necklace that had been his mother's; his wife had sold her wedding-ring—all she had left to sell. Then more than a thousand good, true men turned their faces to heaven and swore that they would be faithful to the cause, even unto death. Suffering had cowed the other Valmondans; these it had ennobled.

When Carlos Reynaldo bade his parents and sister farewell, his heart broke within him, yet he smiled bravely.

"You will hear of it when I return," he said to his father. "The night following, your men must be ready, on the hills back of the city. Watch the bay. You will see a signal. Then fall upon the city—you will win easily. *Adios, padre amado mio!*"

Stealing up the coast to another port, he sailed under an assumed name for Rio de Janeiro. There he bought a large steam yacht, which he had refitted and painted in gaudy colors. Among the things taken

aboard were a stock of fine wines and other luxuries. Carlos worked as a laborer himself in the overhauling of the vessel, to save expense.

With forged papers, and with a well-paid crew of Brazilians who spoke Italian well, and who knew how to keep silent concerning the little that they knew, the liberator set sail for Valmonda. He was attired in a yachting suit of white; across his breast were strung half a dozen strange-looking medals and decorations; his face was disguised by a pointed beard and mustaches that turned smartly upward.

When they were well clear of Brazilian waters, he called his men about him.

"I wish to speak to you," he told them. "You will be rewarded beyond your expectations for this cruise, and you will have no dangers to combat. You are all native Italians, are you not?" He accompanied the latter sentence with a narrowing of his dark eyes.

A chorus of affirmative shouts rang back to him.

"And I am an Italian count, the Conte di Mezzilone, am I not?"

Again the affirmative cries.

"And," pursued Carlos, well pleased, "I am exceedingly wealthy, and in high favor with the King of Italy, am I not?"

The Brazilians answered as before.

Hereupon Carlos went to his cabin, returning a moment later with an Italian flag. "Run that up," said he.

Then the liberator went to the bow of the yacht *Tibaron* and stood watching the little vessel's nose cut its way through the sunlit tropical sea toward Valmonda.

Not a great many days later, the *Tibaron* flung her anchor in the harbor of San Bernardino. The papers were examined, and passed without exciting suspicion. The Conte di Mezzilone was cruising for his health. The sailors were loosed in the city, with their pockets filled with money, and with orders to spend it lavishly. Furthermore, they had been told that they must talk much of the affluence of their master, the noble Conte di Mezzilone, the close friend of the King of Italy.

And they carried out their orders. The news spread like burning oil; it caught like a contagion. The army began to brush its uniforms for—it knew not exactly what; the two wooden warships drew near to the gaudily-painted yacht in order that the marines might see to better advantage the famous man from far-away Europe. The eyes of all were startled by the vessel's gorgeous appearance.

Carlos Reynaldo sent a message to Horus del Sangre, inviting him and his cabinet to spend the evening aboard the yacht. Horus was pleased; it savored of a night of revelry, a night at the gilded shrine of his favorite god Bacchus, a night in the dreams of wine. He replied graciously that he would be delighted to accept the count's invitation.

Night fell like a quick eclipse of the sun, as it ever falls in the

tropics, and it found the yacht *Tibarón* alight from bow to stern with Japanese lanterns. Tables had been set along the deck; easy chairs lined the rails.

Carlos walked the deck nervously, wondering if Ramon Loban lived. He could not risk trying to find out; there was too much at stake.

Early in the evening, the yacht of the avenger was crowded with the president's adherents. Horus del Sangre, too, was there, smiling, evil-eyed. As long as there was the least space unoccupied—and the *Tibarón* had a spacious deck—Carlos invited more of the scum aboard. In the end even a number of private soldiers were there.

Wine began to flow. At Reynaldo's request, servants from Del Sangre's own household were used to distribute it—the sailors belonging to the yacht, Carlos explained, were drunk ashore. The band began to play the national anthem of Valmonda. Then Carlos rose to his feet, feigning that the wine had gone to his head, and begged that the tyrant allow the two war-ships to be brought rail to rail with the *Tibarón*, that wine might be passed to the soldiers that crowded them. Horus, with an exclamation of praise, gave the order.

Ah, the Conte di Mezzilone was a prince—not a count, but a prince! Hundreds of glasses were emptied into throats that cried out to his health.

Soon the wine began to bring out the true natures of the despot and his men. There were songs that rang in young Reynaldo's ears like the hisses of serpents; oaths that nettled his clean heart with pain; vulgarisms that made him shrink.

The drunken ruler drank to the death of Ramon Loban. Then he called upon his noble host for an address, just as Carlos had supposed that he would do. The "Conte di Mezzilone" rose from his chair at Del Sangre's right, which was beside the forward port rail of the vessel. It was time for the master stroke; it was time for the signal to the thousand patriots who waited on the hills with fowling-pieces and machetes—and poor Reynaldo could not even know that his friend Ramon was among that thousand men, and almost well of his wound.

Carlos was pale, but his eyes glowed with the fire of victory. His right hand sought the rail, about which he gripped his strong fingers as if to steady himself. Cheers rang out. Horus ordered silence. Then Carlos spoke; and so stunned were the despot and his men by what he said that they sat as if frozen.

Said Carlos Reynaldo, aiming the index finger of his left hand at the tyrant's wine-reddened face: "Never before have I seen gathered together so much vile scum. And, Horus del Sangre, you are the most vile of all the scum in the sewer of your administration. You have been the shame of Valmonda, you and your throat-cutting followers. On your black-rotted souls be the curses of Heaven forever! I pray God

that the fires of perdition may torture your cruel spirits doubly with each passing moment of eternity!"

He stopped. There seemed to be a smothering weight on his chest. Not a hand was raised against him, so great was the surprise.

"And now," he continued triumphantly, tearing from his face the disguising bead and mustache, "perish at the hand of Benito Reynaldo's son! Be Thou avenged, outraged God—and beloved Ramon, whether thou art living or dead! Open, thou hell, to receive these maggots of thine!"

He turned his eyes to the star-pierced sky, wordlessly thanking his Maker that he could put to such good use the life that dwelt within him. Then he pressed a button concealed beneath the rail of the yacht, and along a slender wire connecting a battery with a whole yacht-load of coarse black powder ran a streak of electric fire!

Those watching on the hills saw a mountain of flame leap upward with a deafening roar; saw the livid air dotted with dark, mangled things that were bodies empty of souls; saw the two wooden war-ships break into irregular sections and go to the bottom laden with half a thousand corpses. It was stupendous. It was awful.

And yet it was magnificent; for the patriots under Benito Reynaldo the Righteous swept down upon the city and to victory.



MOTHER-OF-PEARL

BY MARY ELEANOR ROBERTS

CAST from the infinite swell,
Caught from the foam and the swirl,
This is the heart of the shell,
Mother-of-pearl.

Nacre, ir'radiant, blent,
Hidden away from the sight;
Tender the splendor that meant
Pearls should be white.

So in my heart would I store
Beauty of sky and of sea,
All heaven gives me and more—
All is for thee.

THE WOOING OF KITTIE BELL

By Lowell Hardy

"I NOTICED before now," said Frosty, resuming abruptly the conversation of some miles back, after the manner of the West, "that a man kin get action fer his money 'most anywhere—pervided, o' course, he's that kind o' a man." Frosty dropped the reins over the horn of his saddle, and, abandoning the pack animals to the care of the old, white bell-mare, felt in his pocket for his tobacco.

"Now, take Jeff, fer instance. It shore is great doin's when a bashful, retirin' cowpuncher like him kin win out a girl like Kittie Bell—an' he obliged to do the principal part o' his courtin' in his underclo'es, aided an' abetted by me, in the same state o' undress!"

"Nothing could be more exciting," I admitted freely, "even in the city."

"Well, I dunno nothin' 'bout that; but tell me—how else kin you get results except by things happenin', huh? Where would Jeff be right now ef it was n't fer us agoin' on that jamboree into Red Bluff, an' stealin' a horse from a livery stable, an' havin' to hide out, dish-a-billy, so to speak? That's what brought them nupshells o' his about!"

Frosty eased himself in his saddle, inhaling lingeringly of the "Princess Fine Cut" as he settled down to his story.

"You see, Jeff had been courtin' Kittie Bell 'most since the time she was able to walk without holdin' on, an' he'd made 'bout as much progress in them devotions o' his, up to when this here blow-out o' our'n intruded itself, as a hen sittin' on a nest o' glass eggs. It looked like to me, at the gait he was goin', he'd just 'bout get his courage up to askin' her when they was both ready for the Old People's Home.

"Trouble with him, he was too blame timor-eous ever to say anything to a girl that she could answer 'yes' to—even ef she wanted. It was the arrival on the scene o' a party by the name o' Huggins that was the means o' spurrin' him on to action.

"Now, this Huggins was up here with a surveyin' outfit, lookin' fer a pass through these mountains that would n't be more'n a two per cent. grade all the way. An' I could 'a' showed it to 'em in a day's ride ef they was askin' fer advice—which they was n't. When he'd been here no time at all, this surveyin' person was a-ridin' over to see Kittie Bell on some excuse or other a average o' three times a week, countin' Sundays.

He shore started out like he aimed to get her or bust a cinch, an' I'm obliged to say that Kittie Bell, bein' a girl, did n't appear to hate him any fer it.

"Says Jeff to me when things had been runnin' 'long like this fer some time: 'It's lookin' bad fer me, Frosty. He was out to see her again yesterday—all dressed up like a Fourth o' July horse, an' givin' himself airs. An' he brought her a box o' candy, too, tied up in pink ribbons. The two sat there in the hammock, skylarkin; an' he fed it to her, a-smilin' away like a dod-gasted coyote an' sayin', 'Sweets fer the sweet!' an' similar foolishness till it 'ud 'a' made you sick!'

"What was you doin' all this time?" says I.

"Me—why, I was over talkin' to her ole man. We was discussin' the subjeck o' Black-leg, which had got in among his cattle, an' when we came back from lookin' at a colt he had out in the corral with a bad wire-cut, doggone ef this Huggins had n't took her off buggy-ridin'! That's the kind o' feller he is—do anything! An' here I been tryin' fer the last month to sorter get my nerve up to ask her.'

"Well,' say I, 'you could n't expect her to get so carried away listenin' to you an' her dad talkin' cow diseases, that she'd refuse a invitation to go buggy-ridin' with a real beau—even ef he was n't a authority on Texas Fever an' hoof-rot. Jeff,' says I, mighty solemn, 'it looks to me like you got to change your tactics a whole lot, an' be pretty *pronto* about it, too, or first thing you know we'll find ourselves crimpin' down on our terbaccer to buy them a wedding present!'

"I'm plumb shore she ain't fell in love with him yet,' says Jeff, wipin' his face like it was a hot day an' lookin' mighty uncheerful, 'but this Huggins is a terrible high, wide, an' fancy talker, an' used to the society o' ladies. Also, I had my forchune told me last time I was down in 'Frisco, an' I reckernized him the minute I laid eyes on him fer the tall, dark man I was warned to look out fer. What do you figger I better do about it?'

"Why, up an' ask her first,' says I. 'It might be presumin' a mite on such short acquaintance, but you're facin' a dread alternatiff: she's bound to wed up with somebody before long, an' ef you don't watch out it'll be Huggins, shore as you're a foot high.'

"I reckon you're right. What kind o' a idy would it be,' says Jeff, chirkin' up a little, 'ef I was to sort o' lead up to—to it by makin' her a present o' some kind—jest to give her a notion, so to speak, o' what was comin'?''

"Fine!' says I. 'It 'ud save her the shock. What was you thinkin' o' givin' her?'

"I dunno,' says Jeff. 'It's a thing that'll require considerable study. I thought maybe you could suggest somethin' suitable an' refined.'

"It ain't me that's wooin' her,' say I. 'Same time, I reckon it's

got to be somebody, an' the way I'm fixed I ain't partickeler whether school keeps or not, so long as the pretty schoolmistress stays in town. Such bein' the case, get out the catalogue,' says I, 'an' we'll peruse the subject further.'

"With that, Jeff clumb up on a chair an' got down 'MacDougal, Spears, an' Co., o' Chicago,' an' we spread her out on the table. I reckon she weighed fourteen pounds, an' they was eleven hundred an' sixty-seven pages. It shore looked easy to cut out one little present fer a girl from a herd like that—an' it would 'a' been fer some people. What stood in the way was Jeff's modestness. He did n't seem to regard ladies as humans, at all, an' his feelin' that-a-way made him plumb hard to suit. Right off at the start, I was fer a nice pair o' fancy ridin' leggin's with white buckskin fringe down the sides, that I saw on page 1,129, article 732-G, at \$3.48; but Jeff was shocked.

"'Where's your delicacy?' says he. 'Think fer a minute where she'd have to wear 'em!' says he, blushin'. 'An', besides, they're too blame dinky. Kittie Bell ain't no three-forty-eight gal! Let's get her something that has some size an' style to it while we're about it. What's the matter with makin' it a organ?'

"Well, I had to sit up 'most all night with him arguin' that it would n't do to go givin' two-hundred-dollar presents to a girl he had n't so much as asked yet. 'It's too expensive,' I says.

"'That's all right,' says he. 'What's a nickel, any way? Skim another pan o' milk an' go ahead!'

"'Not so,' says I. 'We got to use reason in this here matter, or we'll queer the whole shootin'-match. Now, here we are,' says I, havin' jest spotted the very thing we wanted. 'Page 8,098, article 167-F. Gen-u-wine quadruple plate, satin-finish, combination toilet an' manicure set. Comprises mirror, comb, hair-brush, nail-file, manicure-scissors, nail-polisher, two salve-jars, cuticle-knife, an' tooth-brush; all in the latest French design, with heavily embossed, raised figgers o' Cupid—Love's Message Pattern. Whoop-ee-e! That's the stuff! An' all in a fancy red plush box with tufted white satin linin'. We could n't do better!'

"'You shore they ain't anything sorter—er—suggestive-like about it?' says Jeff. 'Mentionin' by name all them things which is to be used in the privacy o' her bird-wore might be took in a way they was n't intended. I don't want to give any cause fer offense.'

"'You won't,' says I. 'Mind, I ain't sayin' it don't look a little mite ris-ky, but ef so, all the better. They all like it. An', besides, it's jest as well to let her know what a devil you really are, right now, before you're married. It would n't do to spring it on her all to once!'

"At last he gave in—that 'Love's Message' was too strong fer him, an', it bein' now 'most daylight, I went off to bed, plumb wore out, an' left him to make out the order. Afterwards I saw I should n't 'a' let

him write the letter, the way he was feelin'; but when I thought o' it it was too late. He'd already sent her off.

"The present came. It happened I was there at the time, conferrin' with her dad over some calves he wanted marked. In the box along with the present was a valentine card Jeff had bought the year before and lost his nerve afterwards and did n't give her. He'd sent it 'long with the letter to be put in the box, showin' who it was from. When she was opened up, Kittie Bell, girl-like, read the card first. 'With Fondest Hopes!' was what it said.

"Well, sir, next they unwrapped the present, and what do you think they'd sent? *A baby-buggy!* It was one o' these new-fangled kind that fold up and you kin carry in one hand. I took one look at Kittie Bell, standin' holdin' that card in her hand, and then at the box, and I judged it was time to go.

"Jeff was mixin' a batch o' bread when I got out to the cabin, an', hearin' me comin', he opened the door an' stood with his hands full o' dough, wonderin' what was up. I told him what had happened.

"At first he did n't seem to sense what I was sayin', an' it was only when I'd gone over it three times he understood. Then he was like a madman. After he'd quieted down some, he went out an' got the riggin' on his horse.

"'Where you goin'?' says I.

"'I dunno,' he says, 'but you better come 'long.'

"Now, there's times when sympathy is out o' place. Action's what counts. In less'n three minutes I'd shifted my saddle onto that Keno horse o' mine, an' we was on our way into the Bluffs.

"What happened the first part o' the evenin' I fergit—nothin' much, I reckon, an' what did got wiped clean out o' my mind by so many things coming along after. It was pretty well 'long in the evenin' when we sorter drifted into a place named 'The Cowboy's Home,' an' while we was there Jeff got into a argument with a long, red-headed party from down Chico way, that was up here buyin' mules, over how far the sun was from the earth. Now, this here feller claimed it was ninety-five million five hundred miles away, an' Jeff offered to prove he was a liar. Not that Jeff *knew* anything 'bout it, but the way he was feelin', he did n't aim to let this person get away with any sech feeble bluff as that while he was 'round, ef he could help it.

"'M' friend,' says Jeff, eyin' him mighty cold, 'ninety-five million five hundred is a whole lot o' miles. It takes a long stretch o' country fer that many miles to spread out in, an' don't you fergit it!' Now, ef this stranger had knowed what Jeff had been through, he'd 'a' shet up an' let it go at that; but no, he was shore wedded to his convictions, an' jest right in the middle o' Jeff's efforts to convince him he was wrong, an' everybody was standin' by to see fair play, some fool sent out a call

fer help, an' along comes the little tin-horn marshal they got there an' spoiled everything. He pulled the stranger out from under Jeff, so's Jeff could get up, an' gave him a talkin'-to. Then he asked us ef we'd mind turnin' in fer the night, so's the barkeep could go to bed, on account o' havin' to get up early in the mornin'.

"He was so nice an' perlite about it we did n't have the heart to refuse, an' he took us 'round to a hotel run by a friend o' his an' saw us to our room. We went so easy I reckon he was suspicious, an' he waited 'round till we was plumb into bed, an' put out the light.

"Well, so long, boys," he says as he was closin' the door. "You're all right fer the night now, an' in case you pile out before I do in the mornin', an' find you need anything you have n't got, rouse up the clerk an' tell him to come to me fer 'em. Ta-ta!" He spoke from 'way up-hill—an' a cow laughed. Dunno how a real cow got there, but while I was tryin' to figger it out, Jeff must 'a' been doin' some thinkin', too, 'cause pretty soon he spoke.

"Say, what kind o' talk do you call that he was makin' jest now?" he says, kinder thoughtful-like. "It sounds like he knowed something we was n't up on."

"Now you speak o' it, it did seem that-a-way," says I; an' we laid there fer some time, puzzlin'. Pretty soon Jeff got up out o' bed, an' I heard him battin' 'round the room like a blind dog in a meat-shop, huntin' fer something.

"What's wrong now?" says I. "Shall I call nurse?"

"Fer a minute he never spoke. Then says he, 'Frosty, get up an' light the light'—which I did, wonderin'. Jeff was standin' in the middle o' the room. He had his boots in one hand, an' his coat in the other. His eyes was wild.

"Ef you'll believe me," he says in a hoarse, tremblin' voice, "that slab-sided, knock-kneed, cow-hocked son o' a snappin' turkle o' a marshal has gone an' stole our pants an' went off with 'em—makin' o' us prisoners!"

"We jest stood there a-lookin' at each other fer a minute, then Jeff began to pull on his boots.

"What you aimin' to do now?" says I. "Where you think you're goin'?"

"Get on what you got!" says Jeff. "We're goin' home! I would n't stay overnight in this dog-hole ef they was to give it to me! Hump yourself." Inside o' two minutes we was out o' that room an' creepin' down the stairs. Nobody was in sight, an' we got safe into the street. Jeff started off toward the lower end o' town.

"Hi! Hold on," says I, in a loud whisper an' grabbin' at his arm. "Where you goin'? Did n't we leave them cayuses up at Shaffer's stable?"

"No, we did n't," says Jeff. "We put up at Jim Towne's—don't

you remember?' Well, I was o' the idy we had n't; but it was too blame' cold to stand an' argue in our bare legs, so on we went. A light was burnin' in the stable, but no one was in sight. We went in an' took a look 'round.

"'It's a funny thing to me where them hides o' our'n has gone to,' says Jeff, when he saw the horses was n't there—still refusin' to let on he was wrong. 'Funniest thing I ever heard of!'

"'Oh, I don't know,' says I. 'I ain't amused any!' Jeff started to answer me back, sassy, when all o' a sudden he stopped short an' caught hold o' me.

"'S-s-sst!' he says. 'Who's this comin'—over there by the water-in' trough?' I looked; an' I saw a person sneakin' 'long close to the wall, scrouchin' down an' actin' mighty suspicious-like. I could n't see him very well at first; but he kept on, an' in a minute the light from the stable struck on the marshal's star! We both saw it to oncet.

"'Good-by, Sweet Day!' says I, prayerful-like an' weak. But Jeff was took wild.

"'Vamoose!' he says. 'I can't fight bare-legged, an' I'm not goin' to be roped by that dog-eatin' constable an' paraded through town—not alive, any way. We got to get out o' this!'

"He did n't have to speak twicet. We made a jump fer the nearest horse, an' both o' us got hold o' him to oncet, draggin' him out o' the stall by the halter.

"'Leggo, you blame fool!' says Jeff, glarin' an' climbin' aboard. 'I choosed this first. Go catch one fer yourself!'

"'Why me?' says I, an' by then we was both on. They was no time now to change. The marshal was comin' on the run, hollerin' fer us to give up an' be arrested peaceable. Fer a answer we both let drive our heels into the bronk's ribs, an' he shot out o' that stable like he hated it.

"Turnin' the corner, I looked back an' saw the marshal throwin' a saddle onto another horse. Jeff off with his hat an' clouted our steed over the ears an' let out a yell that 'most scared him into fits. He shore ran like a streak. We crossed the river an' left the town behind. We heard the marshal when he hit the bridge. He fired a couple o' shots, but it was only a bluff—he could n't see nothin'. It was as dark as the inside o' a cow, an', besides, we had considerable the start o' him on account o' his stoppin' to saddle up.

"When we'd gone a couple o' miles or so, we slowed up some an' listened, but we could n't hear anything, an' after that we took it easier. Jee-mima! but it was cold!—specially from the waist down. I stopped worryin' 'bout that pretty soon, though, 'cause I was thinkin' o' something, an' it drove everything else out o' my head.

"'Jeff,' says I after a little, 'don't you notice any change comin'

over the landscape. It looks to me like daylight is creepin' on us. What you plannin' to do when it's light an' folks is abroad?' Now, it gets light mighty quick in these mountains when it oncet starts—same as you spoke of before now—an' by the time I was through speakin' the sun came up over the Buttes, an' there we was. I looked at Jeff, an' ef it was my last act, I'd 'a' laughed.

"'That's right! Laugh an' show your ignorance,' says Jeff, blushin' an' beginnin' to get mad. 'Look-a-here! Suppose a lady—Sufferin' catfish!' he says. 'I believe I hear somebody a-comin' now! Where'll we hide?'

"'Quick! Git fer that cabin,' says I, pointin' to a sheep-herder's shack close beside the road a hundred yards ahead o' us; an' I don't mind sayin' I was some anxious to make it myself. In ten seconds we was inside the cabin an' had the door shut—jest in time! Jeff crep' up to a window that was cut in the wall next to the road, to take a peep. He dropped like he was shot.

"'What's the matter now?' says I. 'Who——'

"'It's Kittie Bell!' he says, givin' a groan.

"I looked, an' shore enough, there she was—comin' 'long on her little palimino horse that she always rode, an' I tell you she was a picture! She was the sweetest, handsomest, healthiest female creature I ever laid eyes on. She rode easy-like, an' the little horse acted jest as ef he knowed what he was a-carryin'. There was always something sort o' modest, yet darin', in Kittie Bell's face that was enough to warm the heart o' any male man on earth, regardless o' age, complexion, or previous corndition o' servitude. Jeff saw I was gettin' ready to speak to her.

"'D-d-don't d-do it!' he says, shakin', but Kittie Bell heard me clearin' my throat, an' it was too late.

"'Good-mornin',' says I through the hole, an' removin' my hat. 'This is a fine time fer a ride. What brings you out so early?'

"She stopped her pony an' lookin' round quick, tryin' to find where the voice came from. Then she spotted me at the window.

"'Why, good-morning,' she says, starin' kind o' puzzled-like. 'You 'most frightened me. I did n't know any one lived here. I've been over sittin' up with the little Boone baby that's sick an' am just on my way home. When did you move in?'

"'Last night, ma'm,' says I, 'late.'

"'An' are you all alone?' she says, mighty curious.

"'Well, no,' says I, kickin' back at Jeff, who was pinchin' me on the leg an' groanin'. 'Mr. MacCullough is with me.' At these words o' mine she sat up mighty straight an' sudden, holdin' her chin a little higher in the air. 'But he's—er—not feelin' well,' says I, tryin' to think o' somethin' to say quick.

"She looked hard at me. 'Is he really sick?' she says.

" 'Never saw a man more so!' says I. 'I don't know whether I kin save him or not.'

" 'Of course, if it's anything serious like that, why, I——' She came a little closer.

" 'That gave me a idy. 'Well,' says I, 'you see, it's this-a-way: I'm not certain yet jest what it is he's got—an' it ain't safe fer you to come too close, 'cause it might be smallpox. He's been delerious all night—plumb out o' his head—an' it looks to me like it's been comin' on fer days. I noticed he's been actin' queer fer some time.'

" 'Oh, Mr. Ferguson,' she says, an' I saw it was workin' fine, 'I did n't know—probably he was n't responsible. I—he—but of course, if he was sick! Maybe he was out o' his head, and I——'

" 'Now, that's all right,' says I, comfortin'-like—an' jest then Jeff let me have a punch that 'most knocked the wind out o' me. 'Ef you'll excuse me,' says I, 'I got to get right back to him. He needs attendin' to. Jest suppose you don't say anything to anybody about this here illness. Maybe it won't amount to anything, after all, an' there's no use gettin' folks all worked up over it until we're shore. What you might do,' says I, 'is to bring us out a little grub to sort o' hold us over till we find out.'

" 'I'll do just as you say,' says she startin' to go, 'but had n't I better fetch a doctor? Do you think it's safe to go on this way?'

" 'He's all right fer the present,' says I. 'Get back as soon as you kin.' She nodded her pretty head, thoughtful-like, gave me one o' her smiles, an' was gone.

" 'Now you went an' done it!' says Jeff, when he had watched her disappear, eyin' me mighty onfriendly-like. 'You're a fine man to go helpin' folks in their love-affairs, ain't you? First off you queer me with her ferever, sendin' her baby-buggies—nice present fer a girl, was n't it?—an' then you have to go an' drag her into this here mix-up. What d'ye think o' yourself, any way?' Well, I saw it was no use tryin' to argue with him over them onjust charges he made, while he was feelin' the way he did, so I did n't tell him what I thought. Nothin' was said fer a minute. All o' a sudden he jumped up an' took another look out o' the window an' began to hop up an' down an' cuss.

" 'There goes our horse,' he says, pointin' down the road, 'back to town. Doggone it, why did n't you hang on to him! How we ever goin' to get away from here now?'

" 'Well, he was n't my horse, was he?' says I. 'I was a-ridin' with you. It looks like we'll have to up an' hail the next feller that comes along an' get him to bring us out a couple o' pairs o' overalls.'

" 'We did n't though, 'cause the next feller that came 'long was ol' Mis' Watson, from over on Paine's Creek, drivin' into town, an' we held our breath till she got by, watchin' her through the window. Jeff wanted

to hang something over it, 'cause they was no sash, an' he was afraid somebody might come an' look in; but I showed him we was safer without, on account o' it's attractin' attention to us. Then we waited an' waited. Jeff spent all the time he was n't watchin' out the window, cussin' me an' him fer a pair o' fools, an' swearin' off. He made up a list o' all the things he liked to do that was fun an' said he had quit 'em fer good. Smokin', drinkin', gamblin', an' horse-racin' went first, an' 'long toward the end he put in chewin'-gum, too, an' was considerin' coffee, an' molasses on hot-cakes.

"He was 'bout the miserablest man I ever saw. 'Now, here's my chancet,' he says, 'to make a play an' win her, ef I'm ever goin' to— an' look at me! Nice-lookin' object to go courtin', I am, to say nothin' o' ever bein' able to face her again after what has happened, which shore was enough to make any girl think twicet before enterin' into matrimony!'—an' I saw he was still thinkin' 'bout that baby-buggy.

"It was mighty wearin' on us stayin' there in that little two-by-four cabin, with not even anything to smoke, on account o' leavin' our terbaccer in our pants pockets. Also, we was nervous about a hornets' nest which hung from a beam in a corner of the cabin; deserted shacks, that-a-way, bein' favorite places fer hornets to hive up in fer the winter. This one o' ours, havin' no windows, made it right easy an' invitin' fer 'em. O' course, they was n't really much danger o' them comin' out till spring, unless they was disturbed—which we was mighty careful they was n't—but we'd had a spell o' warmish weather lately—that is, fer this time o' year—an' you could n't tell. Oncet Jeff listened up close, an' he thought he heard 'em millin' 'round inside, so we judged they was no tellin' when the spirit 'ud move 'em to come out an' see who they had fer neighbors. Takin' it all 'round, we was feelin' pretty desperate.

"Says Jeff: 'This here has gone on long enough. What's the use o' bein' squeamish! I'm goin' to get a rock an' go out an' hold up the first man that comes along with a pair o' trousers on, an' take 'em away from him.' But no travellers came the whole day. Jest before sundown Kittie Bell showed up with our dinner, an' I tell you, we was glad to see her.

"I made up my mind to speak.

"She brought us a fine lay-out o' grub, an' I reached a arm out o' the window, which was small an' only showed me down about a foot below my chin, an' she handed it to me from her horse; but I shore felt kind o' funny, knowin' what I did about the rest o' me.

"'How's our patient, this evening?' she says, fixin' her eyes on me in a way that gave me terrible funny feelin' down the back o' my neck. 'Is he still unconscious?'

"'Not this minute,' says I, 'but he has been—ravin' somethin' awful! Took all my strength to hold him part o' the time. He seems to have

somechin' on his mind that won't give him any peace. It was all about a present it appears he sent for to give somebody, an' they made a mistake in the order an' sent——'

"'How interestin'!' says she, stiffenin' a mite. 'You can tell Mr. MacCullough I inquired for him;' an' she started to go.

"'That won't help him any,' says I. 'It'll make him worse. What he wants is a chance to explain to some one how it happened—get it off his mind.'

"'That's no more than reasonable,' says she, pretty eager it seemed like, an' keepin' them eyes o' hers right on my face. 'Why not bring him out here? I know the fresh air would be good for him. Shall I help you?'

"'I—I think he'd rather I'd do it,' says I, scared stiff at the idy; an' between Jeff clutchin' at my legs like he was drownin', an' Kittie Bell sittin' there smilin' at me, I 'most lost what wits I had. 'It 'ud be better to wait a few days, till he's stronger an' feels like doin' it himself,' says I, gainin' courage an' puttin' up a strong front, considerin'.

"'Just as you say,' says she. 'I did n't mean to interfere, but probably I'll not come this way again, and I wanted to do what I could—this being the last chance. How long,' says she sort o' careless, 'do you expect to remain here?'

"'I dunno,' says I, mighty truthful fer oncet. 'It all depends.' An' the idy came to me, hard, that it looked like we'd be there till we had white whiskers to our knees, unless something was done.

"'Miss Kittie Bell——' says I, decidin' in a flash to tell what we'd had happen to us an' throw us on her mercy; but she must not 'a' heard, fer jest then she touched her pony with them sharp little spurs o' hers, an' he jumped a rod.

"'Monte's anxious to get home,' she says, 'an' I'm not able to help any here, it seems. Don't forget to tell Mr. MacCullough that I asked for him, please, and that I've been feeling hurt that he has n't been to see me. He's not a very loyal friend,' says she, a-smilin' down into my face, an' I knowed Jeff heard her, by the way he was clingin' to my elbow. 'He leaves me entirely to the care an' mercy o' any stranger that happens along. I don't believe it makes a bit o' difference to him, though.'

"'He's a changed man!' says I. 'You'd hardly know him. He got to be a regular kleptomaniac—one o' these here people that's always thinkin' 'bout committin' suicide an' sech. I never saw anybody so low in their minds!'

"'Are you shore he would n't like to see me?' she says, still clingin' to that idy o' hers. 'I believe I might be able to cheer him up an' make him feel better;' an' she made a motion as ef to get down.

"'You stay right there where you are, Miss Kittie Bell!' says I. 'He ain't feelin' anything extry; but he'd be took a sight worse ef you

was to come in here!' an' I could feel Jeff, scrouchin' down behind me, shakin' like a leaf.

"'Oh,' says she, throwin' her head back a little an' pickin' up the bridle-reins, 'o' course, if that's the case, I'm sorry I——'

"She made a move to go.

"'Kittie Bell,' says I, 'most crazy at the idy o' her leavin' us, to say nothin' o' Jeff poundin' me on the back continual, 'wait jest a minute. We're in a awful bad fix. Listen an' I promise to tell you the truth, the whole truth, an'——!' Jeff had let go o' me by this time—kind o' sudden, too, I thought—an' I heard him scufflin' 'round behind me, and a funny, buzzin' sound goin' on, but I did n't dare turn away to see what it was.

"She waited.

"'Kittie Bell——' I started in over again, wonderin' how I was ever goin' to say the rest—but I never got the chancet, fer all o' a sudden the noise inside got worse, an', first thing I knew, the door o' the cabin flew open an' out come Jeff! He was the funniest sight I ever saw. He must 'a' cleared fourteen feet that first jump, an' when he hit the ground he let out a screech an' tore fer the timber, gettin' behind the first tree he come to. He had on his own clo'es, what they was of them, an' he was holdin' my coat up 'round him fer pants.

"I looked inside the cabin. Gosh a'mighty!—it was them hornets broke loose! It 'peared like they figured spring was come an' it was time fer 'em to be up an' doin'. The air was brown with 'em, an' more was pourin' out o' the nest every minit, to join the revellers.

"I never lost my presence o' mind fer a minit. Beyond takin' the slight precaution to climb up the wall a mite, so's I could jump through the window without any delay, in case o' emergency, I made no move. I judged I was pretty safe fer a while, so long as I kept still, on account o' them requirin' some time to get organized fer work after bein' shut up so long in the dark.

"'Miss,' says I, addressin' Kittie Bell, 'would you mind ridin' down the road a piece while I vacate these here premises in favor of some o' God's prettiest creachers, which seem to have took possession o' it fer the time bein'? Owin' to my brave partner, who I see down on his hands and knees behind that stump—the first one over there to the left—havin' helped himself to my wardrobe, I am unable to appear in public.'

"She did n't answer me. She was havin' considerable difficulty untyn' a bundle from behind her saddle, an' I could see by the way her shoulders was heavin' something was affectin' her mighty strong.

"'Catch!' she says, an' tossed it to me.

"'Somehow, I knowed that very minit what was in that paper. An', shore enough, when I'd tore it off, there they was—two fine pairs o' overalls! Come to look at 'em later, I saw they was considerable worn-

out, owin' to her havin' stole 'em out o' her dad's bunk-house while the men was at dinner, but at the time they was the beautifulest sight I ever did see. I looked at Kittie Bell, an' a painful thought come over me. Who was it told her? She read me like a book.

"'Oh, it's nothin' wonderful,' says she, shakin' an' wipin' her eyes. 'You see, the marshal was anxious about——'

"That was plenty fer me. I could feel the back o' my neck gettin' red. 'Never mind,' says I. 'Don't bother to tell us. We——'

"'I'd just *exactly* as soon!' says she, sort o' disappointed-like. 'It's no trouble.'

"'A-hem!' says Jeff, speakin' up bold an' brave. I'd plumb fergot he was there. 'Would you two mind,' he says, 'finishin' up that conversation some other time? It's cold out here, an' my mouth is jest nacherally waterin' fer what I see in that paper!'

"'It's plain that I am very much in the way,' says Kittie Bell, takin' her turn at blushin' when her eyes met his fer the first time, 'and, of course, I would n't think of stayin' where I'm not wanted. We'd better go, Monte. Good-by——'

"'Kittie Bell,' says Jeff, leanin' a good ways 'round that stump fer a man dressed like he was, 'when you get down that road a piece you stop an' wait till I come. I want you to marry me, an' ef I put off askin' you till we get home something is shore to happen—an' I don't feel like I could stand much more! Will you do it?'

"Kittie Bell looked at him fer a minit, sober-like.

"'Yes,' she says; 'but don't stop to primp or I won't wait!''"

Frosty's narrative came to a sudden halt, while he reached from the saddle to catch up a handful of pebbles off the steep slope of Old Man Mountain, to throw at the lead pack animal.

"Soon as she was out o' sight I crawled out o' the window, an' we got into them overalls; and I tell you they felt good! . . . Shore, they was married, right off. Jeff was n't ever bashful any more after that. He would n't 'a' dared to, considerin'.

"Kittie Bell—well, I reckon it was a weight off her mind to have it settled an' over.

"But, say," demanded Frosty, "women is a curious proposition, huh? An' what's more, they never fergits anything. Believe me—right now, we're a little mite careful, Jeff an' me, 'bout singin' too high when Kittie Bell's 'round, 'cause she has a way, sometimes when she thinks we need it, o' not sayin' a word, maybe, but jest lookin' down at our legs—kind o' hard an' signifercant-like—an' we wilt right down, immediate.

"Yes, sir," he concluded, "so far as I know, it's the only mean habit she's got."

THE OPEN DOOR

By *Elias Lieberman*

I.

OLD Ezra Levy was obeying the law of the Pentateuch when he leaned back in his chair and supported himself on his left hand in corpulent semi-consciousness. For this was the holy Seder night, when every man was commanded to be the lord of his household. Even the humble Rivkah, as she drooped with her head enveloped in a clean white kerchief, wore an unusual look of contentment. She and her spouse were conning the Hagada, or Ritual of the Seder, while at the same table little Sammy sat back, eyes closed, very full and very sleepy, for the supper had extended far beyond his usual bed-time. Opposite him was a young brunette. A certain slight irregularity at the bridge of the nose gave the impression of sensitiveness. Her clear, large eyes gazed sympathetically at little Sammy, whose head was nodding on his breast.

"You'd better wake him, Rivkah," said the old man. "I want him to see how I open the door for Elijah, the Prophet."

Rivkah poked her son gently in the ribs. The sleepy child grumbled discontentedly.

"Come, Sammy, wake up or you won't get any *kneidlach* to-morrow," she half threatened.

"Won't," came back in a sleepy grunt.

Turning to the girl—her adopted daughter since the death of her dearest friend, the girl's mother—Rivkah pleaded, "Leah, you tell him. He won't obey me. He's as bad as Joshua."

At the mention of the name "Joshua" the old man's face lost its look of sleepy benevolence.

"Don't let me hear that name at the Seder table," he said sternly. "He who was my son must not be mentioned at my house. He has sinned against God; I will not forgive him. And Sammy—if he is like him, if he travels the path of the unrighteous, let him beware. Out of doors will he go to join his good-for-nothing brother."

"I'll be good. Don't throw me out like Jimmy," Sammy wailed.

Leah went over to the little fellow and cuddled him tenderly until his grief had sobbed itself out against her shoulder, though all the

while her heart and mind were far away with her beloved Jimmy. But too well she recollected his disastrous rebellion. He had refused to pray in the mornings, to put on his *tephilim* (phylacteries), to comply with the dietary laws. These sins, mainly of omission, had vexed old Ezra greatly. Still, he would not have taken the final step if Jimmy had not returned Yom Kippur night, at the end of the holiest day on the Hebrew religious calendar, with a theatre programme sticking out of his pocket. Ill with his all-day fast and the agony of futile attempts to control his son, Ezra quavered, "As one makes his bed, so one sleeps. An undutiful son is a thorn in the side of his father. My gray hair will go down in sorrow to the grave. Woe is me that I should have lived to see you blaspheme His name as you have done. From now on I do not want you as my son. Go!"

She remembered how Jimmy, his eyes moist with wounded self-esteem, had walked out of the house. Since then, as his letters told her, he had fared badly. Working at any kind of employment that came his way, he had by turns been a super at the Cosmopolis Theatre, a porter at the Grand Central Station, until his strength had failed him. His last letter worried her greatly. It contained the news that he was working as a "sandwich man" for a cheap restaurant. In spite of his jocular tone, she feared that poor Jimmy was sinking under the strain. All this he had forbidden her to reveal, even if urgently entreated. But she was spared the trouble. Ezra never asked.

When Sammy's face was wiped clean of tears, the ceremony went on. The candles, fortified at the base by numerous drippings, were burning low in their sockets. Every one looked up as Ezra recited solemnly:

"Fill the cup for Elijah, the Prophet, Rivkah, and open the door."

Sammy, hugely interested, delighted the old man by asking what was going to happen.

"Every Seder night," Ezra explained, "Elijah, the Prophet, visits the homes of all good Jews."

"Does he really come?" inquired Sammy, peering into the darkness. From the neighbors' rooms sounded the interminable jingle which related in Hebrew how a goat had been bought for two *suzzim*, and the dire misfortune which overtook its tormentor, the cat, and so on in a series of subsequent events on the style of "The House That Jack Built." Ezra rose majestically to chant the prayer, facing the open door. The words, as they were pronounced, had the sharp distinctness of diamond facets.

"*Baruch haba!* Blessed be he who enters. Vent your wrath, Almighty One, on those who deny Thee, and Thy anger on the kingdoms that do not acknowledge Thee. Devastate their lands and bring destruction upon them."

As he concluded the prayer, he dropped the ritual book of the Seder

down upon the table with a suddenness that overturned some of the wine-glasses. Like one brought face to face with a ghost, he stared and stared into the darkness. Leah rose all a-tremor. Covering her face with her hands, Rivkah rocked back and forth, moaning. Sammy sat up in his chair erect and wide-awake, eyes saucer-round and mouth agape.

And it was a ghost, indeed, that they all saw impanelled in the gloom of the hallway—the ghost of the Jimmy that was. His gaunt figure grasped the door-posts weakly. Mutely his eyes begged forgiveness. All his old jauntiness had completely disappeared, and was replaced by a hunted look like that of a creature brought to bay by despair. Leah looked at Ezra with feverish interest. The old man shifted his position uneasily, and then his voice came hollow from his chest.

"Go back whence you came and do not darken my threshold again. You have dishonored and disobeyed your father; you have broken the law of God. Had you lived in the olden times, you would have been stoned to death."

The wreck at the door shuddered.

"Forgive me," he muttered weakly.

"As you have made your bed, so you must sleep," replied Ezra.

"Mamma!" groaned Jimmy, putting out his wan arms toward her who gave him birth.

Mother-love cried to Ezra with the voice of Rivkah, "Let my Joshua come back!"

"Rivkah," answered Ezra stonily, "my will in the house is law."

The man in the doorway caught sight of Leah, and then, as if his manhood and self-respect had come back to him, his form straightened up. Soon there was a dark gap where he had stood. The sound of his footsteps died away in the distance.

A hush, unnatural and intense, fell over the family group. Leah gazed hard at the old man, who nervously traced his index finger along the wine spots on the table-cloth.

"We have finished our blessing for Elijah, the Prophet," he said mechanically.

"Elijah will never come to this house," flung back Leah in a choking voice. "A house in which mercy does not dwell is not a house of God. This is all mockery." She took the wine-cup filled for Elijah and contemptuously tossed it to the floor.

Ezra recoiled before her, but said nothing. The skin of his cheeks showed yellow-white, like drawn parchment.

"You, not he, have sinned," the girl continued, pointing an accusing finger at Ezra, who looked wildly at her. "On your head be the heavy burden of guilt for his death, you unnatural father! I'll follow your son."

She got up from her chair and walked towards the open door. Ezra clutched the shawl she had hastily thrown over herself.

"Leah," he entreated—he no longer spoke like a Nemesis, rather like a suppliant—"don't go."

"I must. He will starve. I must do something." Her voice came panting and broken.

"Why do you take his part?" he moaned. "Has he not disobeyed God and his father?"

"Who are you to take the part of God?" she stormed, tightening her shawl. "You are a wicked man, and your hand is already stained with the blood of your son. Is it not written in the holy book, 'Welcome the stranger,' and have not your own ancestors on holidays entertained at their table even the pauper and the outcast? What have *you* done? You have driven your own son, beggared and starving, from your door! Oh!"

Ezra wept. He dropped into a chair like a lifeless mass, and covered his face with his hands. The girl, however, did not stop to look at him, but clattered down the stairs. A big anger possessed her, so that she trembled; it flushed her face and made her eyes sightless. In her headlong descent she scorched her hands against the banisters, but minded it not. It was only when she reached the street that she stopped to consider. A spring breeze, freshening from the southeast, kept patting her cheeks with wisps of her own hair. She looked up and down the street, and noted groups of people leisurely walking in all directions. Where could he have gone to?

A sudden through the thickness of the hall-door, she heard a groaning. The door was wrenched open, and there stood Ezra. He was black under the eyes, but otherwise white as chalk; the wrinkles which in the earlier part of the evening had been apparently smoothed now stood out boldly.

"What have I done?" he wailed, wringing his hands. "Did God demand such a sacrifice? He saved Isaac from Abraham; did He demand my Joshua as an offering? Oh, did he want me to slay my son, my own offspring, my Joshua? Leah, help me, I am sick. My head is turning round, but we must find him. Help me, dear Leah, help me!"

She took him tenderly under the arm, buttoned his coat at the throat, and led him slowly up Eldridge Street, alive with the holiday joy of their own people.

II.

WHERE should they go? Definitely, Leah could not tell. The horror of it all paralyzed reason. She tried in vain to get a clue from his life of the last few months, but this led her here and there without result. She would try the theatre district of lower Manhattan. Per-

haps thither he would wander, seeking the comfort of the electric lights, and the forgetfulness of the eager life. In the happy days they had often sauntered along there, contented with merely looking on at the moving panorama.

As they thus walked up lower Broadway, a beggar shuffled over to the girl.

"Help a poor feller wot's down on his luck," he whined. "Ain't eaten a square meal all day, honest, mum. Gimme a few cents for a cup o' coffee."

His breath came thick with whiskey, and the hand extended in supplication trembled. Leah drew back from him, utterly repelled; he looked so sodden and foul.

"What does he want, Leah?" demanded her companion.

"Money," replied the girl. Then in Jewish she whispered, "He's shamming. Don't give him anything. He'll spend it on drink."

Ezra groped in his pockets. The delighted vagrant seized the dime handed him.

"Thank 'ee, sir; good luck to ye," he mumbled, walking briskly away.

"We live and live, grow old and still remain fools," philosophized Ezra. "Who knows when I shall need charity?"

Peering at every passer-by, the two proceeded up the cañon of lower Broadway. The many-windowed walls on each side reared their cold height towards an elusive vault of thinly-scattered stars. A few ragged clouds were scurrying over the sky. Something almost spectral seemed to haunt this thoroughfare, after the ruck of humanity had abandoned it to the silence of the night.

"We shall never find him," said Ezra disconsolately, when they had reached Waverley Place. "God is punishing me. He is humbling my pride to the dust."

"Hope, hope, Uncle Ezra!" said Leah, with her lips only. To herself, she acknowledged that the chance of finding Jimmy was very slim.

The bread-line which soon hove into sight was to Ezra a complete novelty. The institution was unknown on Eldridge Street. Leah noted the interest with which he eyed the sinuous thread of derelicts, unfortunates, ne'er-do-wells, and frauds, that constitute the most cosmopolitan body of miseries that even New York can show; flotsam and jetsam from the high seas of Life, that had drifted strangely together. He looked open-eyed at Leah when she recounted what they were there for. At the mention of the word "bread," he well nigh gasped.

"But there may be a Jew in the line," he objected. "What do they do for the Jews?"

The girl smiled faintly. "Exactly what they do for the Gentiles," she responded.

"Passover! Jews are not allowed——"

"A beggar with a knapsack does n't choose between bread and butter and *matzos*," Leah explained. "Look around and judge for yourself."

Ezra trudged the length of the line with short, eager steps. Leah felt that he had one hope in common with her—the hope that compelled them both to scan carefully every form they passed. The men they saw wore upon their faces the hard lines of sorrow and sin. Some looked indifferent, even jaunty, whistling the latest popular airs or passing jests with their neighbors; others stood blankly, as if in stupor; still others kept their eyes on the ground and held their heads low. The distribution was to commence at twelve, and the men were shuffling impatiently while waiting for the hour.

Disappointed with the result of his inspection, Ezra had turned to go back, for Leah had suggested the theatre district as their final hope. As they turned, a lean figure shambled over from the opposite sidewalk and joined the rear of the now moving line. Leah strained over to Ezra and whispered tensely:

"There, look!"

"My Joshua! God be thanked!"

"Quickly, before he goes in!" she urged. "Tell him you forgive everything—hurry—he must come home with you. I'll wait here." Her woman's instinct sought to spare him the humiliation of her seeing him on the bread-line.

Ezra hurried over and touched his son's shoulder.

"Joshua," he choked, "Joshua, come home."

Jimmy's look of surprise quickly changed into an expression of defiance.

"What are *you* doing here?" he sneered. "Do you want to see how low I have fallen? Yes, this is rich Ezra Levy's son, waiting for a piece of bread!"

Some of the men on the line grinned at the unfamiliar language. They budged forward slowly, trying to make out the cause of the strange interruption.

"Joshua, I have sinned. Have pity on me, Joshua! Have pity——"

"Don't Joshua me. You told me to-night I was not your son. Let me alone. I won't go home, because I have no home to go to. I have nothing left to live for. I hope that if there is a God, He will pity me and kill me soon." He gulped his words, but doggedly refused to move.

"Have pity on your mother," implored Ezra. A big drop of rain shattered itself against his outstretched hand.

Jimmy sullenly moved forward with the line, followed by his father.

Both of them were too preoccupied to notice that a thunder-storm was brewing, for already the few stars had been swept clean off the stretch of sky, and a uniform leaden darkness took their place. But Leah had watched her uncle's vain efforts, and the menace of the situation impelled her to act immediately.

No sooner had she put her arm softly through Jimmy's than the gaunt figure of the man who had stood passive and scornful before his father shook with a sobbing that he could not control. Like a child walking in the dark he followed her, catching his breath and vainly trying to check his tears. What mattered it that the rain on the wings of a strong breeze was now swishing the sidewalk in flying sheets of water and drenching them all? Leah had found her beloved, the father had found a son, the son had found a father. The gruelling siege was over when Ezra hysterically clasped his son to his heart, weeping to be forgiven, and when Jimmy, a flicker of the old spirited Jimmy lighting up his face, wrung Ezra's hand and patted him on the shoulder.

Through the doorway left open all this time, Rivkah, her eyes very red, rushed forward to meet them, while little Sammy clung to her dress.

"*Baruch haba,*" said Ezra, "welcome him who is come."

Leah passed in last of all and softly shut the door.



SUPREME MOMENTS

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

*THE highest moments are touched with tears
Through our brief years.*

We weep at birth;
We weep—if it be Love indeed that wakes—
When first Love takes
Our hearts and souls and shows us a new heaven
And a new earth.
We weep when friends forsake us; and we weep
When one beloved falls quietly asleep.

*Lord God, let it be given
That, when Death calls us down the shadowy years,
For our poor passing there may be soft tears;
Our going a moment supreme
To one who hailed us in Life's mighty dream.*

THE EVERLASTING EVE

By Mary Brecht Pulver

SIS and Papa were playing and singing duets in the library—or, rather, the piano-player was doing the playing, while Sis accompanied it in a rather squeally soprano that nobody but herself and Papa thought attractive.

Over in the parlor Annabel was entertaining young Mr. Harper. Eighteen-year-old Annabel looked like a La France rose, while Mr. Harper—but my typewriter falters.

You've seen him in the magazines, looking out from a popular shirt and collar ad—a little strong on everything but chin. You've heard him if you've travelled with the senior "bunch" to a prep-school football game.

"I wish," said Annabel, "that Sis and Papa would n't be so silly. I hate those kind of songs."

"Yeah," drawled Mr. Harper. He had no special objection to the song, but Annabel liked classical stuff temporarily, and he *liked* Annabel ditto.

Sis and Papa evidently cared nothing for public opinion, for Sis kept right on buoyantly—

"Rum, tum, tum, tum, tum; tum, tiddle,
Was the tune he played upon his fiddle"

—while Papa encouraged her by beating time with his finger. You might have expected better of Papa, but Sis was only fourteen and really not to blame.

Her real name was Cecille, but she looked Sis so plainly that no one thought of her as anything else.

She was slender—"skinny," the unfeeling put it—with a snub nose, a quantity of freckles, a wide mouth, and two stiff, yellowish plaits of hair. She was dressed now in a blue skirt, with a little white middy, and sat round-shouldered while she played.

Mamma, sewing quietly by the fire, noticed the shoulders and almost spoke—for the thousand-and-umpteenth time—but restrained herself.

It was a pleasant little scene, with everybody comfortable. Even Papa looked relaxed in his house-coat and slippers, with the light on his

bald spot. "That was bully!" he cried, when the song was done; and you would never have supposed him that dual personality by day—official in a shipping-office and commuter on the Erie.

But before they could tune up again, Annabel came to the doorway.

"I do wish, Cecille, you would n't sing so loudly. It's *so* annoying."

"And I *do* wish you would n't call me 'Cecille,'" mimicked Sis delicately.

"Well, it's your name. Anyhow, *please* don't make so much noise. I should think you would n't let her, Papa—it annoys me and Mr. Harper awfully."

"Oh, *poor* Mr. Harper!" cried Sis. "It's too bad."

But she swung around from the piano bench and got out her school-books.

"There is one thing sure," she observed: "if I ever let any *boy* make a complaining old grouch of *me*, I'll know it. I have no *time* for these fellows that are always hanging round Annabel."

Papa smiled over his paper at the boyish head bent above the arithmetic. "I bet you never will," he sympathized. "You have too much sense."

Mamma said nothing.

She was finishing a new frock for Sis's first high-school party; and if Sis had been a little older—or a little prettier—or a little vain of herself! When Annabel was her age—but Sis was n't Annabel. Why, she had left the entire matter of the new dress to her! Mamma, looking over at her little tomboy, smiled, too. There was a gulf of a thousand miles between the two children.

"I suppose I'd better call for you to-morrow night, pardner?" said Papa, regarding the party in question. Sis seemed only languidly interested.

"No, I'll be coming home with Mrs. Burton and Isabel—in their car. I wish to goodness it was n't dancing! I wish they'd give some other kind of party—a picnic or something. I don't care a pin to go. I can't dance anyhow, and I hate to doll up."

"You should n't be so slangy, dear," said Mamma. "Annabel always loved dancing. Would n't you have liked a puffing on this skirt better than the flounce?"

"Oh, Mamma, it's no use—clothes don't make any difference to me."

"You're all right, pardner; I don't want you different. You stay what you are—Dad's little boy-person;" and Papa chuckled comfortably. "One full-fledged young lady in the family is enough."

If Sis felt any emotion as she sailed off to the party in her new finery, she concealed it astutely.

"She's unnatural," complained pretty Annabel. "She said she *hoped nobody* would ask her to dance. Imagine!"

Sis's mother said nothing. A wise mother does n't. She learns to be a philosopher early in the game. Papa, however, chuckled fatuously.

"Had a good time, pardner?" he demanded at breakfast.

"Yes," said Sis absently.

"Isabel enjoy herself? She was quite a while saying good-night."

"It was n't Isabel. Mr. Alexander brought me home."

"Tom Alexander? I thought he was in Chicago, on that steel-wire case."

"Not *old* Mr. Alexander, Papa—his son," said Sis blandly.

"Archie Alexander—that little bookworm? Why, he's only fif——"

But Annabel did not finish. One look at Sis's unconscious face caused her hastily to lift her napkin to her lips.

Papa put down his coffee untasted, a stricken "*Et tu Brute*" look on his face.

"*Mr. Alexander*," he breathed huskily.

But Sis was not heeding. Her eyes had a slightly discontented look.

"I think, Mamma, you might have had my dress made longer. All the other girls did. I look so kiddish."

"It's your usual length, Sissy."

"But for a *party*! And I wish you'd stop calling me 'Sissy,' Mamma—I'm past fourteen now."

"Why, pardner, pardner——" began Papa, but Mamma stopped him with a glance.

There was no Sis waiting for him that evening. To his demand, "Where's your little sister?" Annabel replied:

"She's upstairs putting cold cream on her face. She's going out walking soon with the Mayfields and that Alexander kid. She has a case," she added cryptically.

"And are you going to let her?" He glared at Mamma, but that wise little lady only shook her head.

"The attacks are short, if properly treated. It has to begin, you know," she smiled.

Papa only grumbled something about the Keeley Cure. He tried to tempt Sis by starting the piano-player. He even went the length of rendering a selection or two himself. But he gave up when he heard the street door close. "I feel like a funeral," he growled. "I feel as if some one in this house had died; and some one has—some one has;" and he poked the defenseless fire brutally.

"Mr. Alexander is going to call on Thursday evening," announced Annabel from her newest Chambers confection. "She asked Mamma if he might."

Papa looked volumes at his wife; then went to bed.

But he admitted Mr. Alexander himself on Thursday. Sartorially, Mr. Alexander was perfect. His chubby countenance above the choking

collar shone like a waxed apple; his moist pompadour exhaled gales of bay rum. He blushed a little as Papa took his hat and ushered him into the parlor, but his round eyes behind the thick spectacles were very solemn.

Sis came down looking rather stiff. Her long, rangy legs, prisoned by a newly-lengthened skirt, were obviously uncomfortable, and she sat down as if wearing a back-board.

Papa, glooming in the offing, kept a guilty finger on the pulse of affairs. Conversation moved rather slowly.

Mr. Alexander: "Do you have debating at your school? I'm going to try for a place on our team this year. You get a gold medal. I debated a lot last year. I got honorable mention in the interscholastic on the negative side of 'Resolved: That Shakespeare was greater than Dante.' Our side won. We have them every Friday night."

Sis (who never under any consideration attends a debate): "It must be real nice."

Mr. Alexander: "Yes, it is. But you gotta work awful hard getting ready—the reference works and all that. Sometimes I've worked till twelve o'clock. I don't copy the things—I like to arrange it my own way."

Sis (vaguely): "Oh, yes."

Mr. Alexander: "I like a debate, but it's got to be a *good* one."

Sis: "Oh, yes, it has to be a *good* one."

Mantel Clock: "Tick-tock, tick-tock" (quite a number of times).

Papa (studying an etching in the hall): "They don't seem to get together." A pause, during which the clock is very busy.

Mr. Alexander: "What's your favorite author?"

Sis: "I like lots of authors."

Mr. Alexander: "Soda I. I write a lot myself—poems mostly. I've had two in the school paper. I'll bring them all over some night and read them—I have about thirty."

Papa (in the hall, faintly): "God of Jacob!"

Sis: "Yes, do."

Mr. Alexander: "How do you like Kipling?"

Sis: "I—I don't think I ever read it."

Mr. Alexander: "It's not a book; he's a man. He's written a great many poems and books. I like 'The Light That Failed.' Have you ever read 'Barnaby Rudge'?"

Sis (faintly): "No—we have n't got his books, I guess."

Mr. Alexander: "That's the name of a novel by Dickens."

A pause.

The Clock: "Tick-tock, tick-tock."

Papa (shaking his head): "Crude work."

Back in the library he seemed more cheerful.

"It's going to be a fizzle," he announced blithely.

Mamma and Annabel looked at him with pity in their eyes.

"She's asked Mamma for dancing lessons," said Annabel.

But later it seemed that he might be right, for when Sis joined them she forgot this new self and became almost natural, until Papa ventured an ill-timed jest. She quickly set him right.

No, she had *not* had a slow time. Some people (with a glance at Annabel) spent a whole evening talking about *nothing*, but there were others who preferred *improving things*.

Gradually Sis was transplanted by Cecille. And Papa drooped in vain for his "pardner."

Life of an evening had become a dull affair with three sober females sitting round in proper occupation, or (two of them) entertaining beaux in the parlor. He no longer felt like coming home.

"I'm going out to the Orphans' Home and adopt a boy—a boy with a yellow dog," he growled one evening.

His youngest daughter looked up with a slight flush.

"He would n't stay little always, Papa," she said gently.

"At least," said her parent sternly, "I could shake him at any size."

In the third week of Sis's ailment, the Mayfields' tennis tournament came on. This was an informal neighborly affair, with the bleachers filled with indulgent parents and relatives; but an event nevertheless keenly watched and practised for by the youngsters.

For the two preceding years, Sis and her partner had taken first honors; and as the date approached this year Annabel pressed interested inquiries.

"I'm going to play with Archie this year," her sister announced. "Mixed doubles first and second days. Archie's busy practising every minute. He's not sure enough in his serve."

"Well, I should *think* you'd take a partner who *could* play. Why, Arch is only learning. Imagine a boy of his age not knowing tennis!"

"That's because he's literary. You ought to know that everybody is n't a walking baseball bat, like Bill Harper. Some people have *brains*," defended Sis mildly. "Anyhow," she added loyally, "I don't care who wins this year."

But her natural enthusiasm was a little too much for her devotion, as Papa from the bleachers observed with interest. For as she came up to play, and her young friends greeted her with cheers, he observed that she was very pink and excited-looking; also that she was giving very earnest final instructions to Mr. Alexander, who appeared slightly pale. Their opponents were a Mayfield twin and Bobby Reid, a slashing little dynamo, and Sis's partner of last year.

As the game began, a hush crept over the watchers, for Sis's athletic standing was redoubtable, and her choice of this new, inept partner little

short of a catastrophe in their opinion. Could he or could n't he? Speculation was rife. Then as Bobby assailed him with demoniac drives which he clawed at and missed, and the cool little Mayfield met his feeblest return with neat net-work, this changed to open derision.

From pallor Mr. Alexander went pink—and played worse and worse.

With a furious look at his tormentors, Sis played like one inspired. She was here, she was there—watching, coaching, and intercepting. But it was a hideous fiasco. Not even Love could stem the dreadful score mounting against them. "She's a gritty little soul," thought Papa, watching her, "but she's down and out now."

Suddenly a ripple ran through the spectators; the small gad-flies in the front row ceased their pricking remarks a moment; for as Bobby served a superb ball, Mr. Alexander, in reaching feebly for it, was seen to crumple and drop down upon the court. A moment later, dragging himself up, he faced them all, with a strangely working face and trembling lips.

"My—my ankle," he sobbed—"I've sprained my ankle. I can't finish——"

It is true that he limped badly as he walked from the court.

It was at this juncture that Papa observed Sis, very white and strained-looking, stoop and retie a perfectly good bow in her shoelace. He could have sworn he saw something sparkle on her fingers.

"Substitute to finish set," said the scorekeeper languidly.

It really did n't matter—save for form's sake.

And now a stoutish, grayish gentleman was seen to detach himself from the crowd, peeling his coat as he came.

"How would I do?" he asked modestly.

There was much laughter, but they let him in.

"Come on, Sis! We'll show them a thing or two," he said.

For a gentleman of forty-two years and thirty-nine waist measure, Papa always played a good game, but to-day he outdid himself. As though he were built like Phœbus Apollo, or a puff of thistledown, he danced here and there on his toes, and played matchlessly.

Together they made a brilliant showing in the last two games, and at least reduced the damaging score.

"Who's the better man? Who's the better man?" he kept asking in his bosom as he danced about the court, and he put it up to Sis indirectly while getting into his coat.

"It pays a fellow to keep in touch with the sports," he said. "I think I'll go in for more this summer."

"Oh, *you* always were a good sport!" cried Sis furiously.

"Are you going to play to-day?" asked Mamma, next morning.

"I suppose so. Arch phoned over his foot was better," said Sis languidly.

"Then," said Papa from his paper, "*my plans are all off.*"

"What plans?" demanded Sis.

"Have you forgotten the circus to-day? And me sitting here with two good reserved seats burning holes in my pocket! To say nothing of this year's superb peanut crop. Perhaps *you'll go with me, Annabel?*"

There was a moment's tense silence, while forces cataclysmic gave battle in a maiden's soul; then with a jarring sound of swiftly pushed back chair an excited, armsy, legsy, hobbledehoy girl-thing leaped up to embrace her father's neck with bear-like fervor.

"*I'll go, I'll go!*" she screamed. "*I'm going to the circus with you, Daddy!*"

"Cecille Norton! Haven't you any honor?" cried Annabel. "You've promised Archie to play. You'll spoil everything."

"I don't care—I don't care. They can get some one else. Arch can't play, anyhow—he's only half a boy, and I am sick of him—*sick* of him, anyhow. I don't want to ever hear his name again."

"*Laus, laus, te deum,*" sang the heart in Papa's breast.

"What did I tell you?" he demanded chirkingly, ready to depart for the circus. "It takes Papa to paste a rival one—eh? She's all over it."

"Yes," smiled Mamma—"for the present. But it will return. After a while it will be chronic. You know—

Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet—

and it's the river swallows the brook," quoth Mamma, philosopher and club-woman.

"Nonsense!" cried Papa, and he stamped off with a show of bravado to where "pardner," back in short skirt and middy, awaited him; but as he went Mamma observed a certain chastening in his aspect, as though the truth of the Everlasting Eve had found lodgment in his heart.



RIPPLES

BY THOMAS GRANT SPRINGER

THE Moon's bright hair lies on the sea,
Gilding each dusky billow;
Spread like a maid's, unbound and free,
Over a velvet pillow;
And, crooning low a tender song,
The glad waves comb it all night long.



WAYS OF THE HOUR

A DEPARTMENT OF CURRENT COMMENT AND
CRITICISM—SANE, STIMULATING, OPTIMISTIC

BIRD CONSERVATION

FOR at least a score of years past there has been a brutal and insensate destruction of American birds. Adequate protection has been denied them by reason, it would seem, that "the sportsman won't stand for it." It may be the gunner won't; but every sportsman worthy that estimable title, rather than objecting, will be very strong for such regulations as may be made by Dr. T. C. Palmer, of the Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture, for the enforcement of the McLean law to this end. The notion is erroneous that our birds are the exclusive property of those greedy and selfish men who shoot up to the bag limit. Ninety-five per cent., game and not game, belong to the people who have n't the remotest idea how to handle a gun.

Our shore birds are fast vanishing. There are, or have been, more than sixty species of them in North America. They frequent the shores of all bodies of waters; but many are equally at home on plains and prairies. They used to swarm along the Atlantic coast and in our prairie regions; to-day they are pitifully scarce. The wonder is, they survive at all under conditions so adverse to them. In both fall and winter they are shot along the route of their north and south migration. They decoy readily and persistently, despite murderous volleys. Mr. W. L. McAtee, of the Biological Survey ("Our Vanishing Shore Birds," Civ. 79), indicates other ways by which their existence is made precarious.

Nor need we plead for bird protection on sentimental or esthetic grounds alone. Many species eat such mosquitoes as are virulent disseminators of disease germs. Fifty-three per cent. of the food of birds

from one locality was found to consist of mosquito larvæ; and among the insects thus consumed was the salt-marsh mosquito, for the elimination of which certain States have expended much in money and energy. Adult house flies and their larvæ, which seriously molest valuable livestock, have been found in the stomachs of several species of birds. The North American fever tick, so injurious to cattle, are devoured by the killdeer and the upland plover. Crane-fly larvæ are most destructive in grass lands and wheat-fields; shore birds are avid of these flies. Birds again are very fond of grasshoppers, which are most destructive of corn, cotton, and other crops. Twenty-three species of shore birds were found to have fed on Rocky Mountain locusts—great grain-consumers. Some of our severest economic losses are occasioned by insect destroyers of forage and grain crops; these pests are a natural food of shore birds. The army-worm, cut-worm, cotton-worm, tobacco-worm, and potato-worm are meat for the avocet, woodcock, pectoral, and Baird sand-pipers, upland plover and killdeer. The principal farm crops have many beetle enemies; birds thrive on these beetles. Much else to the same effect is on record. It were well indeed if the governments of all our States would second the Biological Survey in the enactment and *enforcement* of legislation protective of bird life. The real sportsman would heartily second such legislation; only the "game-hog"—who, after all, is n't so very numerous—would be disgruntled.

JOHN B. HUBER, M.D.

THE ELDER-SISTER TRAGEDY

AMONG the social and domestic problems, that of the Elder Sister should be more sharply focussed. There are homes, many thousands of them, where she has thrust upon her alternately the rôle of door-mat and pack-horse. Her life is merely a matter of doing, and being done out of. Happiness is to her about as alien as a myth to a philosopher. She has days of weariness and nights of sodden sleep, brought on by care or work because she must, or because to rebel is beyond her depleted strength.

Why the first-born girl should so frequently be the chosen slave of her family passes conjecture. The first-born son is more often the ruler of his brothers and sisters, and the pride of his parents. Rarely is he the one who is charged with the combined domestic anxieties, as is the sister whose birth antedates the younger fry. The injustice of this finally amounts to tragedy. "Duty" has killed many such sisters, for what is a stunted life but gradual death? That such a member of a large or a small family is valued is not within possibility. One who is beloved, one who is valued, is saved in all ways, at all times, by her kindred.

There are young women unmarried to-day solely because they have

never had any opportunity or time to be young; who are taciturn because they have never associated with people who talk well; who are spinsters, yet whose motherhood illumines their tired faces at the sight of a little child. And many more are there whose talents would win them place if they had only courage to assert themselves, or to refuse to assume more than their just share of domestic responsibilities. Many an invalid (?) mother coddles her nerves upon a couch, while her devoted daughter crucifies hers in the kitchen. To what end? None—absolutely! To permit one's individuality to be submerged is not only weak, it is wicked, for God has created in us all something that makes for the life personal. The girl who does too much for her family will have to look for her reward in the next world, never in this. "Poor" is the adjective tagged on to Martha's name, and in the family summing-up pity is more akin to contempt than to love. To be everybody's body is to be nobody, hence the tragic error of being the burden-bearer and the too willing runner for those who should use not only their youthful backs, but their legs as well, and share "Sister's" spirit-breaking duties. When financial conditions are squally, the elder sister has an especially hard itinerary. If she is pursebearer and marketer, which she usually is, daily miracles are expected, and uncanny prowess in making a very little money satisfy not only landlord and tradesmen, but the hundred and one incidental demands of a careless family as well.

Is it any wonder that she fails to shine after the day's work is ended? That she prefers to stay at home rather than fare forth gaily "with the crowd"? She is too tired, body and soul and spirit, to "get into the game." Her lustreless eyes and listless manner earn for her the reputation of being dull, queer, unsocial. Rather than wait to watch for Prince Charming, sister Martha steals softly to bed, perchance—who knows?—to dream of the might-have-been. Favoritism of this sort is a sin for which God will surely hold parents and kinfolk responsible. Among a family of young people, the Elder Sister has a God-made prior right to her chance for happiness, to live the normal life of a normal woman, of wifehood and motherhood: who hinders her unduly has much to answer for, much to expiate.

MINNA THOMAS ANTRIM

THE BORROWED YARD-STICK

"IN this volume Mr. Tubbs has attained the right to be considered the American Stephen Phillips." "The critics have pronounced Mrs. Matterhorn's play to be an American 'Alice in Wonderland.'" "Mr. Ogden Slapper, the American Whistler, is giving an exhibition of his works." "The young contralto has been universally

acclaimed as an American Schumann-Heink." "Mr. Apinger, the American Kipling, is about to issue, etc."

These remarkable and fantastic comparisons—with merely the names of the victims, or the imitators, as the case may be, charitably disguised—are carved with shears bodily from recent issues of our newspapers. They seduce one into a state of deep and dismal thought. In their jaunty journalese there lies a profound national humiliation. They abash into the dust the soul of every American whose ideas of independence are not circumscribed by a flamboyant catherine-wheel on the Fourth of July.

These jewels from the critics' lips are the signs and symbols of a servility which fetters the American mind as rigidly as Ivan the Czar ever fettered his serfs, or the trusts our pocket-books. One almost hears the doleful rattling of the intellectual chains. If one looks sharp at the noble marmoreal brows of those who say such things as I have quoted, these two words may be read upon those walls which harbor so much lazy thought: "Made Abroad." What are we to say of criticism so timid, ignorant, and spineless as to be incapable of independent judgments? How shall we resist these bloodless borrowers of other men's thought? They are not only ridiculous in themselves, but pernicious to others.

It would be well if the mountainous and coruscating intellects who traffic in stale comparisons and second-hand standards might observe their effect upon the astute European mind or see the cynical smile which steals over the faces of cultured foreigners who, despite all their respect for American genius, have not yet learned to tag their great men with such labels as, say, "The English Edgar Allan Poe," "The German Walt Whitman," "The Russian Sargent," or "The Portuguese Mark Twain."

Why should we not ring the changes upon the term "American" down to the smallest but still clamorous fraction of our stupendous commonwealth? Why should not our States and cities, and our villages too, each bursting with provincial or parochial pride, share in the imported honors? Then we may be edified by seeing our journals sown thick with new variations of circus phrases,—“The Illinois George Bernard Shaw,” “The Milwaukee Caruso,” “The Squirreltown Meissonnier.”

This reckless labelling of native art according to foreign standards, this measuring of the native artist by the achievement of his foreign brother, is an unconscious operation of the critic's or journalist's mind; it leaves him naked to a white and withering light. It is of the sharpest significance. It means either that the critic is hopelessly empty, ape-like, and imitative, or that the artist is so. Does it signify that the critic is keen enough to scent out the inspiration or the model upon which the "creator" has patterned his work, or that he who appraises it has

no values or standards of his own, but only hearsay opinions and a purloined set of haphazard phrases? That bright and precious phenomenon, the creative critic, has evidently not yet arisen in our midst. We have attained a form of civilization distinctly our own, but its artistic products are still weighed in balances of alien manufacture.

The world of art and culture is a universal world; national tags but proclaim the tyro in the field. One need not be a shouting mass of flaming patriotism in order to protest against this attitude—one need hardly be “an American William Tell” in order to refuse to bow down to that particular cap upon the pole. It is sufficient that one have a true regard for that far finer thing, the culture of a people—or—let us be modest—for the cultivation of that culture.

There exist gentle souls who may hold it vain to attack these monsters of mental unoriginality, these lazy slaves of the thing that is, or that has been said. Perhaps. They may possibly collapse upon their own emptiness as soon as their supports are withdrawn. Unto the true American artist, rooted in his own ideals and lighted on his way by his own inspiration, is given one unanswerable answer to all such laughable appraisals. It is a challenge modest and yet proud, it is attack as well as defense: “A poor thing, but mine own.”

HERMAN SCHEFFAUER

VÆ VICTIS!

By Ramsey Benson

THE conquest of America was too big a job for the English Army and the English Navy, but the English Sparrow is made of different stuff. He wears no flashy red coat, and when he goes forth to war the beat of drums is conspicuous by its absence, yet it was only a very short time after he landed on our shores until he had us, in the words of the day, tied to a post.

And it never cost him a cent. He made us pay all the expense of the war and then “beat us to it.” That is the height of military strategy—something that neither Hannibal nor Napoleon achieved except in much lesser degree.

Each year we pay an enormous tribute to the English Sparrow—more, probably, than was ever paid by a conquered nation before in the history of the world.

The English Sparrow does n't even pretend to be in favor of universal peace. If he ever heard of the Hague Tribunal, he lets it make no difference with him. His work is war, he is always on the job, and he has nothing to arbitrate.

IS THE UNITED STATES USING UP ITS WORKING CAPITAL?

By Edward Sherwood Mead, Ph.D.

ARTICLE II.

IN last month's article, the argument was advanced that the United States, so far as appearances went, was living on its capital; that an increasing percentage of the national income was being used to supply personal wants, and a decreasing share was being put into the extension of the national plant and equipment. In a brief view of the familiar facts of consumption, much was found to support this contention. We found that an enormous amount of the national income goes to supply the national needs, wants, tastes, and appetites, many of which are of recent origin. Can we argue from this admitted fact, however, that saving, investment, accumulation, are on the wane?

To answer this question, we turn to the facts of investment. The only record of national saving which we have is found in the figures of stocks and bonds issued. If these figures show a decreasing or slowly increasing movement, it is a safe conclusion that the nation's extravagance is running into a serious situation. If, on the other hand, we find that security issues are rapidly increasing, we can dismiss with a friendly gesture of farewell the pessimistic statements of our scientific friend, whose views were presented in the August issue, and whose opinions have been so generally echoed during the past year by those who are always ready to despair of the republic.

We turn first to the record of new securities, stocks, and bonds, listed on the New York Stock Exchange, and we take a ten-year period, from 1903 to 1912 inclusive, and compare the first five years with the second. From 1903 to 1907 the issues to obtain new capital, not including issues to replace old securities, amounted for bonds to \$1,738,000,000 and for stocks to \$813,000,000. This was a period of extraordinary prosperity, surpassing anything previously known in our history. Business was everywhere expanding, and industrial plants of all kinds were springing up or enlarging. The investment markets, during most of this period, were in a condition of flourishing vitality.

Prices of securities were high, and, generally speaking, advancing during these years. They are usually referred to as a period during which the national wealth was more largely increased than ever before in the same length of time.

The years 1908 to 1912 inclusive, from a business standpoint, were by no means so prosperous. The effects of the panic of October and November, 1907, lasted throughout the following year. Not until the summer of 1909 did substantial recovery begin. From that time on to the end of 1912 business conditions were good, but, in the opinion of business men, not as good as in the years which preceded the panic. And yet, during this half-decade, compounded of moderate prosperity and acute business depression, the total issues of bonds for new capital amounted to \$2,775,000,000, and the issues of stocks to \$1,442,000,000, an increase over the first half-decade of almost 60% in bonds and 77% in stocks. The rate of increase in the output of securities is ahead of the increase in national income measured in terms of wheat, corn, oats, cotton, and other materials and finished products. On the basis of this statistical comparison, the United States is not depleting, but is rapidly increasing, her capital. Expenditure is rapidly increasing, it is true, but saving is increasing still faster.

These figures showing the relative increase in investments do not, moreover, set forth the real situation. They are too conservative. They relate to the New York Stock Exchange, and the New York Stock Exchange is by no means relatively so important as it was ten years ago. In spite of the widespread fears of the "Money Trust" reaching out from Wall Street to absorb all the industries of the country, it is a fact that the prominence of New York as a financial centre is rapidly decreasing. In all parts of the country local security markets are growing in importance. Columbus, Scranton, Louisville, Reading, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Denver, and a large number of other cities have developed financial markets, where local capital goes into local stocks and bonds.

The investment banking business has also experienced a remarkable development in recent years. One New York house last year sold approximately \$100,000,000 of securities, and only a moderate percentage of these issues which are retailed to the investor are listed for public trading. The total amount of securities issued to obtain new capital, if these figures are available, would show over the last ten years a much more rapid rate of growth than the increase in the total of listings on the New York Exchange.

Another bit of evidence upon this point is most convincing. The figures of municipal bond flotations, compiled for seventeen years by the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, shows a steady and rapid increase. Counting only the issues for the first six months of each calendar year, the total sales of municipal bonds from 1908 to 1912 inclusive aggregated

\$1,004,000,000 as compared with a total of \$544,000,000 for the five years preceding, an increase of nearly 100 per cent.

The United States is not generally considered a nation of investors. Popular opinion places this country far below Great Britain, for example, as a saving nation. And yet in 1912 the amount of securities issued in this country was \$2,253,000,000 as compared with \$1,050,000,000 in Great Britain. The highest figure ever reached by the investments of Great Britain was \$1,335,000,000 in 1910, \$900,000,000 below the record for the United States.

The United States is the greatest saving nation in the world, because it is the nation where wealth is increasing most rapidly. It is literally true that the American people cannot spend their income. With all their extravagance—with \$300,000,000 estimated waste in the national finances and an equal amount in the State and local government finances; with an estimated cost of seven billion dollars to transport and distribute to the consumer food products for which the farmer receives six billion dollars; with the waste of the liquor traffic; the waste of vice and crime, superimposed upon the rising standard of personal consumption—in spite of all this lavish scattering of the national income, the wealth of America continues to increase. The American people are not using up their working capital. In spite of the utmost efforts to make themselves poor, their riches continue to increase.



RETURN

BY NANCY BYRD TURNER

SOMETIMES I wake when dark is fathoms deep
 To find my pillow wet with bitter tears,
 And know that far away among the years
 My heart has sought you, walking in its sleep.
 The little spent moon creeps behind the sky,
 A faint star, following, glimmers and is gone;
 I hear the long tide shifting, seaward drawn,
 And all the winds are vanquished utterly.

They will return! And now upon the hills
 Trembles an ancient light; a hidden bird
 Somewhere among unfolding flowers is stirred
 With prescience of the dawn. The whole earth thrills.
 Ah, they were foolish tears! Shall these things be,
 And my beloved come not back to me?